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New Theology No. 7

# New Theology No. 7

*Edited by*

MARTIN E. MARTY

and DEAN G. PEERMAN

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M.E.M. and D.G.P.



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## Introduction

### The Recovery of Transcendence

"To TRANSCEND" means to go beyond limits and powers or to be higher or greater than something or someone. "Transcendence" implies "the quality of going beyond or being superior to." Influenced by the historical experience of the Western world, the *Oxford English Dictionary* moves a step further and turns theological: "Transcendence" is "of the Deity, the attribute of being above and independent of the universe, distinguished from immanence."

Given all these beyonds, highers, greateres, superiors, and independencies, the term is necessarily vague. Suffice it to say that it points to the most difficult categories in religious language—and is the theme of most of the articles in *New Theology No. 7*. At first glance, patient readers of the preceding six volumes may think that we have come a long way to arrive at this central theme. For if transcendence refers ordinarily to a God who is "above" or "ahead"—to use the spatial and temporal metaphors—most of the theology of the 1960's purportedly has been characterized by reference to the "here" and "now," as summarized by and symbolized in the word "secular."

After our annual season of search through theological journals to determine what themes have been most creatively treated, we decided upon the concern for transcendence and rather diffidently announced to friends and advisers that it was to be at the center of this book, where it would serve as a wrap-up for the 1960's and as an opener for the 1970's. Re-

actions varied. Some said, in effect, "It's about time!" Several years ago a reviewer writing in *The Living Church*, while paying compliments to our choices as being accurate and apt selections out of the decade's obsessions, went on to say that little of new theology seemed to be theology. Little of it talked about God; so much of it talked about man. "It's about time!" To some people, confronting transcendence means return of the prodigal from detours in the mucky secular world.

Others (don't picture hordes—these are twos and threes) suggested that since this was to be the *New Theology* series' seventh or sabbatical volume, perhaps we were taking a rest from the rough and tumble, exhausted as were other editors from preoccupation with the frantic themes of future, hope, and revolution. Transcendence in such a context might imply a quiet retreat into the world of the timeless, a resort to contemplation. Had we found our security blanket in a world of turbulence and change?

A couple of people on whom we tried out the theme were a bit suspicious about the character and quality of our content analysis of theological journals. After all, we have steadfastly refused to feed the titles of all the articles into computers in order to produce statistical analyses. (*Every* topic would lose out in the anarchy of a statistical analysis of the better theological journals!) We have persisted in being sniffers and searchers, working with both science and hunch, both calculation and intuition.

Those who are aware of our method of selection may feel that conservative instincts had finally come to prevail; that, wearied after collecting the remains of a decade of improvisation and faddism, we were turning to transcendence-talk simply as refuge. According to this reading, we would be guilty of reporting based on desire-being-the-father-of-the-choice, or of looking ahead in self-fulfilling prophecies. Talk about transcendence and maybe it will come back; everything will be dull and quiet again. One friend even reviewed the rhythm of past volumes for us. After "secularity" and "death of God" in volumes two and three the pendulum swung, and

in *New Theology* No. 4 we talked about "beyond the secular" and "the new religiousness." In annuals five and six we swung with the radicals, giving attention to the theology of hope and the theology of revolution; so it was time now to give equal time to the cautious alternatives and to whisper about transcendence.

We hate to disappoint readers who share the expectations or cynicisms of any of these counselors, some of whom seem to have gained their experience by chatting with Job. Look into earlier volumes and see all the God-talk; look into this one and see all the man-talk. The issues of immanence and transcendence both have to be dealt with in both contexts. While this is a "sabbatical" year, we are neither tiring nor retiring. We do indeed try to move with some sense of predestination, letting the plot of this book follow the good sense of journal editors who have endeavored to ferret out creative new work. Let us also say that the pendulum, balance, and equal time play no part—at least no conscious part—in our selection of themes. We fail, as do our authors, if we somehow give the impression that this year's essays represent security or refuge. To us, secular theology, with its sometimes cozy sense of at-homeness in the world as it is or was, is more safe than the upsetting, off-beat, unbalancing talk about transcendence.

Our interlocutors would not have challenged us, however, unless they had had some perception that other things besides transcendence-talk characterized life in the theological world of the decade past. Indeed, we would not have bothered to consult them had they not had that perception. We have gone on to do some second-glancing, deeper-probing, and resurrecting to cluster these essays. At the same time, our activity does inspire a backward glance at the way the themes this year relate to those that have gone before.

First, it must be said that journal authors and editors did not this year abandon the other themes that surfaced in the 1960's. Future historians of theology assessing this period will be much more likely to note the obsession with the secular than the durable fascination with the transcendent. Contribu-

tors to journals of 1968 and 1969—from which these essays are drawn—did not turn their backs on the secular, immanent, this-worldly, and here-and-now milieus of theology. That Western theology, and particularly Christian theology, was able to cut off its centuries-long retreat from secular advance and that it was able to engage in some sort of about-face—even to the point of embracing this world as the workshop or arena of God—strikes us as an impressive contribution of these years. Most of this volume's essays on transcendence take for granted the setting and some of the findings or assertions of secular theology, the "normative" theology of the early 1960's.

But to this must be added a second, converse point; namely, that authors and editors have never abandoned concern for the transcendent in the midst of their here-and-now talk. In 1960 in his book *The Transcendence of God* Edward Farley looked around him and recalled the immediate past, complaining that to many theologians and other experiencers ours was "the age of immanence." In *God Up There? A Study in Divine Transcendence* (1968) David Cairns spoke of "the present predicament" caused by a confining sense of immanence. Kenneth Hamilton complained of an "earthbound God" in *Revolt Against Heaven: An Enquiry Into Anti-Supernaturalism* (1965). Significantly, all three of these writers drew on contemporary resources to show that the transcendence motif had not disappeared. In fact, Hamilton drew upon the concepts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the favorite of the secular theologians, and counted him "a voice affirming heaven."

If Farley, Cairns, and Hamilton were against-the-grain theologians who tended to isolate transcendence, mainliners like John A. T. Robinson and Harvey Cox were eager to suggest that they were interested not in jettisoning the metaphors of transcendence but in rephrasing, reworking, relocating, or remythologizing them. While a few radicals like Thomas J. J. Altizer were explicating a mythology without transcendence, more of their colleagues wrote in the mood of Gordon Kaufman, who asked whether it might be possible to speak of

"Transcendence without Mythology" (*New Theology* No. 4).

To these two generalizations let us add a third: it will soon become clear to readers that the authors of these essays, the editors who deemed them worthy of publication, and we who chose them for re-publication do not conceive of "transcendence" as a conservative category. We hinted at this understanding in the above reference to the "coziness" of secular theology, but it deserves elaboration. If man is alone in the universe, if there is no opening to any sort of "beyond," he will not necessarily become irresponsible. It would be a travestied misreading of history to suggest that responsibility is born only in the face of capital-O Otherness. But men who have experienced transcendence have often, for better or worse, found reason to use this experience as a lever for change in human history.

The Montanists, the medieval sectarians, the left-wingers of the Continental Reformation, the radicals among the Puritans, the revolutionaries in the recent Christian past—all have spoken more loudly and acted more boldly because of their experience of transcendence. *Dieu le veult*: God wills it. That call starts crusades. *Jihads* or holy wars are generally based on transcendent appeals. If such appeals have introduced ugly notes into the record of change and conflict, it should also be said that revolutionary pacifism and peace-making have often been sustained by witness to the transcendent or the Other.

Three deaths during the period covered by this volume symbolize something of the connection between transcendence and radical power. Karl Barth symbolized the century's strongest Christian witness to the "Wholly Other," so much so that critics of secular theology like Britain's philosophical theologian Eric Mascall blamed Barth's extremism for causing the pendulum swing to godless theology. Whatever else Barth was, he was not a symbol of the *status quo*, whether in his defiance of Nazi resolution or in his unwillingness to be simply anti-Communist when simple anti-Communism was the fashion in the West.

Another man who died during this period—indeed, on the same day that Barth died—was Thomas Merton. This Roman Catholic monk who tried to fuse the possibly contradictory, possibly complementary, experiences of Christian contemplation and Zen, stood as a post-World War II embodiment of concern for the transcendent in the midst of American materialism and secularity. Yet Merton used his abstracting, withdrawn, and contemplative vision to become one of the most gifted, enraged, and effective opponents of racism in American domestic affairs and imperialism in Vietnam. Merton linked transcendence-talk with upsetting language about society.

A third death, that of James A. Pike, recalls a third kind of quest for transcendent experience. Whereas Barth's remained straightforwardly biblical (or "kerygmatic," as the professionals would say) and while Merton looked to the religions of the East in order to become philosophical, poetic, and even mystical, Pike in his later years turned more and more from Christian resources to newly vogueish fascinations with astrology, psychokinesis, ESP, psi-phenomena, and even seances in an effort to transcend ordinary experience and to come into contact with the *Unum*, the eternal, the immortal, the Other. While by that time Pike had lost much of his power to change society by working on the conscience of the churches, he had throughout his career identified with prophetic and upsetting forces in Christianity, and refused to see his latter-day concerns as a refuge from change and flux.

Immanence-radicality? Transcendence-conservatism? Not in our book, as subsequent pages will show.

That transcendence-talk was implicit in the strivings of the immanence theology of the 1960's is a fact that can be explained in part by a tracing to the sources. Two examples will have to suffice.

One of the mentors of the Protestant this-worldly theology of the decade was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis fifteen years before it began in 1945. Whatever else he stood for throughout his pre-war theologizing, he is remembered as



an anticipator of religionless Christianity in "a world come of age" and for his attacks on ghostliness, spookiness, shallow spirituality, escape into otherworldliness—themes adumbrated in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bonhoeffer's call for "this-worldly transcendence" virtually became a cliché in the theology of the recent past. In that phrase he compressed something of what he had learned from his liberal teachers at Berlin on one hand and from Karl Barth on the other. He combined in it something of what cultural analysis told him with what biblical witness told him. The secular theologians liked his adjective and neglected his noun.

Bonhoeffer's witness to the transcendent was not fully conceived or clearly articulated—whose is? But he did not lightly abandon concern for it. In his ambiguous, half-thought-out, self-contradictory, and controversial later writings he remained convinced that this-worldly transcendence is not to be a suffocating, claustrophobic picture of man's life. He was critical of mere chatter about otherness and beyondness and the piety that went with them. In one of the more refreshing lines of modern theology he "spoke frankly" and said that to long for the transcendent when you are in your wife's arms shows, to put it mildly, a lack of taste. "It is certainly not what God expects of us." Bonhoeffer related immanence and transcendence to the metaphor of polyphonic music, with the "other-worldly" as a kind of *cantus firmus* which allows for counterpoint in relation to other themes of life. He distinguished between inauthentic and genuine kinds of transcendence; the genuine variety accepts the life God gives and is not a base for escape.

Bonhoeffer wanted to eliminate transcendence as that category which implied a "space for God" at the point where resources give out, or at the edge of things. His effort to resolve the tension, a characteristically Lutheran one, relied on Christology. He saw in Christ the "man for others," the author, bearer, and finisher of transcendence—and he left a host of problems for philosophical theologians and people who worry about things like "Christomonism." Unsatisfying as Bon-

hoeffer's solution may be, his case is adduced here to show that he did not lose interest in transcendence as a base or catalyst for theology.

Throughout the years of our annual anthologies the strongest influence on Roman Catholic world-directed theology was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who died on Easter Sunday in 1955. Unlike Bonhoeffer, Teilhard was disinterested in most theological themes, but he did seek to combine his Jesuit obedience with his scientific vision and to work toward a synthesis. Observant of the weight of evolution in history, he turned attention to the world. To many half-thoughtful followers and to most Catholic detractors, Teilhard seemed to lead Christians to an embrace of the world, to the neglect of even a vestigial quest for the transcendent.

Teilhard vehemently put down such followers and attackers in his lifetime. Like many men in the subsequent decade, he wanted not to deny transcendence but to reformulate the concept of it. In *The Future of Man* he asked whether the Higher Life, the Union, the long-dreamed-of consummation that has hitherto been sought *Above* "in the direction of some kind of transcendence" should be sought *Ahead* in the prolongation of the inherent forces of evolution. "Above or Ahead—or both?" This was the vital question, answers to which would mark a decisive advance on the part of mankind toward God.

Those who insist on viewing transcendence only in "purely exteriorized" terms, complained Henri de Lubac, made use of Teilhard in dispensing with the concept of transcendence. But when a San Francisco newspaper in 1952 reported that Teilhard's God was becoming immanent in the evolution of the world, the priest wrote a friend that he was annoyed by an interpretation which in an offhand way "makes me jettison a divine 'transcendence' that I have, *on the contrary*, spent all my life in defending," though at the same time seeking to reconcile it with an immanence which demanded a new place in philosophy and religion.

Just as there was guidance from mentors like these two in the past—even the recent "prophetic" past—so also was there

guidance from the outside. "The world" became bored by (if it ever was interested in) purely immanent and worldly theologies. If "church-talk" was just like "world-talk," then why bother with the inconvenience of dealing with archaic and arcane symbols? The outsider regularly called for a recovery of the transcendent in Jewish and Christian spirituality and theology. Only such concern would lead to the possibility of old faiths once again being taken seriously.

Sometimes, it is true, the outsider's concern took the form of a teasing or twitting, a "since you can't put up, why didn't you shut up?" questioning that represented a secular fundamentalism. It opposed any developmental picture in religion and wanted an easily dismissible faith—dismissible because it enshrined as normative obsolete, implausible, not necessarily salutary world views. Referring to one "outsider" who he believed resorted to this approach, William Hamilton complained of "the Walter Kaufmann syndrome," expressed also by secular critics of Bishop John A. T. Robinson; it was the expression of "many secular modern men who like their theological foes to be as orthodox as possible so they can be rejected as irrelevant."

At other times a Malcolm Muggeridge syndrome was evident; some tired secular modern men, "converted" to their particular impression of what a historic faith must have meant, dismissed all other elaborations of such faiths. To them, contemporary social action in theological circles, for example, was merely adaptation and accommodation to the world as it is. In a kind of yearning, nostalgic spirit, they pressured the churches: "Come on, give us full-blown transcendence, stand out from the pack—and then you may be taken seriously."

Pressure on theologians often came not only from outsiders and eccentric converts but also from scholars of religion at the edges of theology. An example might be the witness to the importance of transcendence in the contemporary human record on the part of many religious sociologists and anthropologists. The Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers sponsored a high-level colloquium on the culture of non-belief in March

1969. By inviting students of man and society instead of diviners or divines, the Secretariat virtually assured that the culture of non-belief would instead be translated to the culture of other-belief, and that men's experience of the transcendent—and not their sense of aloneness and expression of unbelief—would be the central object of study.

An eavesdropper at the discussion table at Rome would have found himself drawn to men like Robert Bellah or Peter Berger, the latter the chairman of the conference. What did Bellah talk about? For a sample, see his paper on "Transcendence in Contemporary Piety," an essay we would have printed here had it not already had triple exposure—at the conference, in the Beacon Press publication *The Religious Situation: 1969* (edited by Donald J. Cutler), and in another Beacon book, *Transcendence*. Bellah was not interested in reiterating traditional theology's picture of transcendence. But he did focus on men's current experience of transcendence in their "piety." He turned to the poetry of Wallace Stevens, the "peak experiences" described by Abraham Maslow, the symbols by which men live, and was unashamedly urgent in his appeal that theology take up the human response to the transcendent.

In 1968 Peter Berger published a book which has come as close as any to being an event in the circles in which we move, a tone-setting work which helped us locate the themes of this anthology. The critical response to his *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Doubleday) was an expectably controversial blast at theologians' casual dismissal of the supernatural or the transcendent. He asked them to "go naive," to be "cognitive deviants" ready to go against the grain of a secular culture to see what really moved men—and then ended up showing that the supernatural and the transcendent, not "secularity," may have been *with* the grain of culture. As often happens with prophets, Berger asked religious scholars to have the courage to go against a trend—and then helped set a trend: witness the themes of our book.

No one, Berger least of all, would be prepared to argue that he did justice to all the themes he took up in his too-brief book. But he did succeed in showing that the model of secular man (the swinger, in control, cool) was not exhaustive; that perhaps man-turned-to-the-supernatural was more nearly normative; that the sciences of man had previously systematically screened out study of the transcendent.

In the constructive portion of his book, Berger turned to "signals of transcendence" or "prototypical human gestures" to reopen the discussion of religion and man. Partisans of the book, many of them too hungry for such language, swooped down on it as if it were a modern *Summa*, with new miniature proofs for the existence of God. Berger made no such claims. He only wanted people to observe humor and play, order and outrage—and most of all hope—as "signals" that had been overlooked. He left plenty of problems for traditional theology. He remained devoted to the Bible but had new difficulties in isolating the distinctiveness of Christ. But in his admitted exercise in simplification he tried to cut through what he saw as secular theology's evasions and obfuscations to come back to an affirmation, anthropologically speaking, of Thales of Miletus' "Everything is full of gods."

To names like those of Bellah and Berger one could add that of Andrew Greeley, who as a priest may well be expected to be more committed than they to finding signals of transcendence. But Greeley is also a sociologist, one concerned to keep his credentials in order and aware that he has gone about his work in a time when theologians were diffident about transcendence. Yet in his 1969 Thomas More lecture on psychedelia and in a 1969 *New York Times Magazine* article on the new religions on campuses, Greeley steadfastly kept reminding his colleagues and readers of what he had been saying several years earlier when it was less popular to do so: man is a celebrating, worshiping, omen-moved, superstitious being who seems somehow to want to point to the transcendent.

With pressure from outsiders and from the fringe, theologi-

cal circles finally took note of the enduring passion for transcendence. At the suggestion of Huston Smith, the Church Society for College Work held a conference and later published a book on *Transcendence*. A few months later the Catholic Theological Society devoted its summer conference to an astonishing variety of essays and lectures on the same theme—one of which is re-published here.

What strikes us about these conferences, symposiums, anthologies, and individual expressions is their virtually unanimous refusal to repudiate the "this-worldly" side of Bonhoeffer, Teilhard, and the theology of the sixties. They take it for granted and ask, "Given also this perceived world, what charter for theology do we now possess?"

Two sources form the basis of the charter: one might be called the cultural-anthropological and the other the theological-anthropological. The first is symbolized in works like Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Doubleday), a much-discussed essay on youth's obsession to create a "new heaven and a new earth" to counter the embracing technopolis or technocracy which had served as a model for their fathers—and their theological bigger brothers. Roszak, a historian from "the dissenting academy," explored New Left and post-hippie culture and explained the rationale of the outlandish young people who were fending off Protean technology. Wherever he turned he found youth turned on to the transcendental. Far from being a conventional believer himself, he unabashedly joined his juniors (he was thirty-five) in their quest for gurus and shamans, for a magical, mysterious world view as one stay against The End. He tried to distinguish between superstition and the magical, between bad magic and good magic, but these distinctions, he seemed to be resigned to saying, were lost on many of the pansacramentalist subjects of his study. The new transcendentalism of the turned-on young may be superficial and ephemeral, but it has not been easy to overlook it.

In Karl Rahner, to whom long-overdue tribute is paid in this volume, we have seen throughout the years of the past

generation a consistent witness to something of what Bonhoeffer and Teilhard and their heirs were after—transcendental concern and method and witness, in the context of a refined anthropological cast. Influenced by Joseph Maréchal, Martin Heidegger, and Pierre Rousselot, this seminal Catholic thinker has dealt with intuitional aspects of man, with man's infatuation with the possible and his openness to the other, and worked out a sophisticated rationale and anthropology.

Rahner has not been alone. In Jewish thought, Abraham Joshua Heschel, not a systematic theologian, weathered the whole death-of-God era and combined mysticism, prophesy, and revolution to remind us (in Buber's terms) that "God is addressed, not expressed." New young religious thinkers like Sam Keen in *Apology for Wonder* kept open the anthropological side, quoting D. H. Lawrence to the effect that the sixth sense, the sense of wonder, is "the natural religious sense." Father John Dunne, in his imaginative *A Search for God in Time and Memory*, asked people to move from introspection to the transcendent quest for the one whom Jesus addressed as "Abba!"

Hazards abound in any theological venture based on a revised anthropological reading. So man is open to the transcendent. Does that mean there is a "transcendent one"? Or should we simply give up the quest and say that the scholars are keeping alive in sterile ways what once had been vital? Are they what E. M. Cioran called them (in his tribute to Mircea Eliade): "the would-have-been believers . . . religious minds without religion"? The new transcendentalists favored by Roszak may be magical-mysterious, but their efforts to levitate the Pentagon may not be merely pathetic but actually retrogressive in terms of the goals of the anti-war movement.

Hard questions remain. The Pascalian line about God being the God not of the philosophers but of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is being resurrected by men like Edward Farley and Kenneth Hamilton when they make distinctions between biblical-kerygmatic transcendence and philosophical-experiential transcendence. Must such distinctions be made? And

how does one move from general transcendence to specific witness and theology, as in the case of Jesus Christ? Should one rejoice in the new anthropological signs, or are these part of the "elemental spirits" against which St. Paul warns in Galatians, and against which his anti-idol successors have consistently prophesied? Is transcendence to be found Ahead or Above, Here or Now, in an Object or Subject, in God or Neighbor?

If we are correct in isolating this enduring implicit theme from the decade past—on which this volume now places its epitaph—there is promise of excitement ahead in the 1970's for those ready, in heart and mind, for what Buber talked about: "The moments of the *Thou* appear as strange lyric and dramatic episodes, seductive and magical, but tearing us away to dangerous extremes, loosening the well-tried context, leaving more questions than satisfaction behind them, shattering security."

M.E.M. and D.G.P.



## *I: The Call for Experience*

# The Erosion of the Mystery

Irene Marinoff

The lowering of standards and ideals, the reduction of Christian truth to "pliable human material," the rejection of any concept of God as the Numinosum—such are the tendencies which Irene Marinoff sees in the present-day church, and of which she complains. Though her plea for "discovery of the heart and its *mystique*" is couched in rather traditionalist-sounding terms, there is one aspect of the church's tradition which she wants no part of and which she holds partly responsible for the decline of spirituality: a "tortuous and tortured" asceticism which she attributes to the male of the species. British-born, Miss Marinoff is a convert to the Church of Rome from Anglicanism. She is the author of *The Heresy of National Socialism* and two books on educational subjects in German—*Pädagogik des Herzens* (*The Education of the Heart*) and *In der Schule der Kunst* (*Education Through Art*)—as well as of articles and reviews on theological and educational subjects in the Catholic press in English- and German-speaking countries. Her essay is from the October 1968 issue of *New Blackfriars*.\*

THE PROCESS of secularization which began toward the end of the Middle Ages seems to have reached its peak. Not only has a way of life developed which no longer even pays lip-service to religion, so that large sections of the population live completely outside any direct religious influence, secular values have invaded the City of God itself. They have all but succeeded in eliminating an entire dimension of experience which, by the grace of God, is open to man. In other words, man is slowly and systematically robbed

\*St. Dominic's Priory, Southampton Road, London N.W. 5, England.

of his ideals. His vision is narrowed down to the here and now. If it is true, as George Herbert wrote: "Who aimeth at the sky shoots higher much than he that means a tree," we are in danger of missing even the tree, unless we stop and take our bearings afresh. It is one thing to say that monogamous marriage, celibacy and the non-use of contraceptives are far beyond the powers of the average man. It is quite another to demand their abolition on these grounds—not only because there have been people—they still exist—who are actually able to live on this level, but chiefly because this would mean ignoring one human possibility. No one would dream of abrogating the law of charity, because most of us sin against charity regularly, often grievously. But the lives of the saints are there to show us that the ideal is patient of realization, even if we ourselves are too weak to approach it more closely. Lower any ideal and a light is extinguished which might have helped us of the average to continue our struggle.

By inviting us to lower our standards, the world has already made an inroad on our religious life and practice. It is making another by forcing its empty activism on the faithful. St. Paul writes: "And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing," and in that same thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians the apostle gives us an idea of what that charity really implies: patience, long-suffering, faith, and hope. It is a sad truth that, while real charity of necessity overflows into good works, good works, as St. Paul reminds us, do not necessarily presuppose charity. One is tempted to misquote Christ's words: "If your charity is not greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). In our anxiety to perform corporal works of mercy we tend to overlook the far more exacting spiritual ones. It is in my opinion a sad sign when a bishop, especially in our troubled times, deserts his flock in order to work in the mission field, or when a priest asks to be laicized because he believes he can be a better Christian if he does not remain on a plane

apart from the rest of the faithful. With the exception of the extremely rare cases of a special vocation, as, e.g., St. Nicholas of Flüe, who left his wife and large young family in order to become a hermit, our duty normally lies in the circumstances ordained by Providence. Nor is it for us to judge by which kind of apostolate we can best honor God. However, activity is at a premium today, and those who like Mary are reproached by Martha are in a sorry plight. One even hears of priests who can no longer find colleagues with whom to discuss the things of the spirit, quite apart from the laity, members of which in the Church of England as well as in the Catholic Church regret this concentration on external activities. "To make the New Pentecost a reality"—by putting money in an envelope! This is a case in point.

On all sides there seems to be an almost morbid fear of the Mystery as such. God is no longer conceived of as the *Numinosum*. Anything that approaches mysticism in religion is devaluated as a "Myth" or "Magic." Since the scientist and technologist—the second-rate ones—have become the pundits of the age, men are haunted by the fear of everything that cannot be calculated or measured. They are quite prepared to settle down comfortably in a world where there are neither angels nor devils—in spite of concentration camps and Vietnam—and where the Mystery has gradually been eroded.

There are many signs of this in the Church. One is the replacing of Latin by the vernacular. The centuries-old language of the Church in the West has been exchanged for the language of the people. We are supposed to understand the Mass better if it is offered in our own tongue, for our own convenience. I do not know whether I am alone in feeling the impertinence in the rendering of *Unde et memores* by: "So now, Lord." I am always tempted to add: "Let's get on with it!" The great St. Teresa of Avila always spoke of His Majesty. Once the Mystery is brought down to the level of the marketplace, it soon evaporates. Great action demands great language, as all lovers of Shakespeare know. And here is the greatest action of all.

Secondly, we are losing our holy signs. In my experience few members of the congregation still beat their breasts at the *Confiteor* or make the sign of the cross during Mass. At a time when the importance of the body for mental health has been rediscovered, when remedial therapy is used to restore psychic equilibrium, we, who should know better, neglect the value of these outward signs by which the body is encouraged to take part in the worship of the soul. These outward signs allow the body to share in the mystery that gives life to the soul. Of all these "signs" the Blessed Sacrament is the greatest. Here again a process of corrosion is going on. The presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is threatened in its unique character by the argument that Christ is also present in his word, in our neighbor and in the Church. To be sure we can find Christ in the New Testament, where our Protestant brethren have found him in the last four hundred years. To be sure he said that what was done unto the least of his brethren was done unto him. To be sure the gates of hell will not prevail against his Church. Nobody denies that. However there are many who despair of finding Christ in his Church, nor is it always easy to find Christ in one's neighbor; as for his presence in the Bible—the history of Protestantism proves that it is by no means an unequivocal Christ who is met in its pages. On the other hand, in the Blessed Sacrament we possess the *totus Christus*, a treasure only available at the hands of a duly consecrated priest.

Christian truth is reduced to pliable human material. There is no mystery left. Everything takes place on a familiar plane. Christ is in his word—so anyone can begin to interpret this according to his liking. Christ is in our neighbor, and we know enough about psychology now to be quite at ease with him. Christ is in the Church, but he is also in me. So I am in a position to oppose the Church as an institution in his name. No supernatural norm is left, the Divine-human Mystery has vanished. We have all become existentialists. What former centuries have taught about the *essence* of things is discarded,

and the scholastic principle of *actio sequitur esse* completely ignored.

It does not make for human happiness nor does it make supernatural truth more easy to apprehend when the Mystery is robbed of its trappings of solemnity and decorum. It is, to say the least, disedifying for the penitent who enters the confessional to find a young priest reading the newspaper. Another example recently witnessed by the present writer in a convent chapel, no doubt with permission of the ordinary of the diocese, is the introduction of self-service into the liturgy. During the Communion the priest gave the host to the communicants, who came up in pairs, then parted and turned aside to "help themselves" to the chalice. Maybe only an experiment. But the spirit behind this sort of thing is alarming. The "message" of Christ, to use the terminology of our separated brethren, comes from above and should be met with reverence, not "grasped" at.

There seems, then, to be a progressive erosion of Mystery in the Church. But if we try to follow through the implications of what is happening today, then we realize that what may here seem a mortal blow to the world view of one generation is only the *conditio sine qua non* of a fuller appreciation of reality. Again and again in the course of history the change in outlook brought about by Copernicus repeats itself, the earth losing its central position in the universe to make room for a conception which can contain the vast galaxies of modern astronomy. Change is of the very essence of life, and it is worthwhile to mention, though not to consider more fully, some of the discoveries that have fundamentally altered our way of looking at the world. The first of these is the discovery that the same laws obtain in the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the atom. Another is embodied in the work of Teilhard de Chardin, the significance of which lies in the fact that he freed modern thought held spellbound by Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* from its pessimism and revealed a positive view of the world in which science and

religion are no longer, or rather seem no longer, irreconcilable, and optimism is again a human possibility. In this connection it is not uninteresting to note that one of Teilhard's religious books, *Le Milieu Divin*, seems to strike men as more of a novelty than women. These find in it nothing new, only a confirmation of what, in their heart of hearts, they have always thought and practiced.

What is the significance of the rejection of the Mystery in this context? In all primitive civilizations we meet with the attempt to conciliate superhuman powers by certain rites and sacrifices. These powers are envisaged as being external to man—they belong to the sphere of Adam, the male of the species. The relationship with the deity or deities, *religio*, is effected by external actions. A man is "pious" if he performs these correctly—*rite*. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition more is demanded. Hence the difficulty we experience when trying to find a modern equivalent for "*pious*" in the recurring phrase of Virgil's *pious Aeneas*. In our eyes this Aeneas is anything but *pious*. It is true, he obeys the commands of the gods, he offers the right kind of sacrifices. But he is not a religious man in our sense of the word.

When we compare the world of the Old Testament with classical mythology, we realize that here it is God who speaks and establishes the ways along which he is to be approached. Leviticus and Deuteronomy are full of these directives. But Yahweh does more. He demands, beyond the formal practice of *religio*, a real *relatio*, a spiritual relationship of the whole people with himself as between bride and bridegroom. With the exception of the prophets, the individual in the Old Testament is still in the background. The Jewish people are the bearers of the relationship. Yet even here there are indications that God demands the whole of man, demands the worship of the heart.

Christ is emphatic in his insistence on *relatio* instead of formal practice. His condemnation of those among the Pharisees who were hypocrites shows that clearly, as does his answer to the question of the First Commandment. Here the

religious center of gravity is transferred from external practices to the heart, the seat of love. The *relatio* of the Chosen People with God is henceforth to be realized in the heart of each believer.

Relationship and all it implies is especially entrusted to women. It is a woman, Eve, who was first tempted and fell. It is a woman, Mary, whose *fiat* heralded the redemption, the restoration of the *relatio* with God. The religious attitude is essentially the attitude of the woman—her acceptance, her docility, her patience and her long-suffering are the patterns of “spiritual behavior,” for in an encounter with God the soul is always the passive recipient, however much “co-operation with grace” may ensue. Christianity was first preached in and to a patriarchal society. The Church owes to men the painstaking elaboration of her dogmas, an attempt to net the Mystery in words. She is indebted to men for her external structure, the “administration.” Here men have achieved great things, working in a field especially entrusted to them. However, their touch is less sure when they approach the innermost shrine, the heart-center of the Mystery, the *relatio* with God. Here they are no longer secure in their own world. Men find it far harder than women to “abandon” themselves to Divine inspiration, even only to listen. When God calls there are objections every time. Moses and Jeremias are two examples. Nothing like it is reported of Deborah or Jael, Mary Magdalene or any other woman in the Bible. In the New Testament St. Peter is perhaps the only man to listen and obey immediately. Yet it is Peter who denies the Lord three times. It required a special Divine intervention to convince St. Paul. On the way to Damascus Christ said to Saul: “It is hard for thee to kick against the goad” (Acts 9:5). Even if this verse is not authentic, it points to an incontestable psychological fact. The male of the species is intolerant of restraint.

It would seem as though he must exert a rigid control over his appetites in order to enter into the Mystery. There is a straight line from the penitential exercises of the Desert



Fathers to the *nada* of St. John of the Cross and the *agere contra* of the Jesuits, which is alien to the soul of a woman, and, it should be added, of an artist. It would seem as though the rebellious nature of men requires this painful activist form of inner purification before they are able to pronounce their *fiat*. For centuries spiritual asceticism has followed this masculine pattern, which is not quite suitable for the feminine psyche whose no lesser problems lie in a different field. The lives of the saints such as St. Elisabeth of Hungary and St. Teresa of Avila prove how much a woman may have to suffer at the hands of incompetent confessors. In the case of St. Elisabeth one is tempted to ask whether the battle of the sexes was not transferred by Konrad von Marburg to the spiritual field. It was surely providential that St. Teresa met St. John of the Cross at a time when he was spiritually mature. Again and again women have been forced to seek union with God along inappropriate paths. As the Eastern Church shows, there is not only one way to union with God. Referring to her sufferings on her sickbed Theresa of Lisieux writes that she either tries to rise above them or creep beneath them. Her "Little Way" is the way of the woman, the way of humility, of abandon, that embraces the details of day-to-day responding with the whole of her being to the call of each moment, in a creative passivity that is complementary to the activity of the man. In his biography of Mère Berchmans, a Trappist nun who went to Japan as a missionary, Thomas Merton remarks that this Frenchwoman was astonished how easy her Japanese novices found it to love God and live a strict convent life. They had, as she puts it, not been spoilt by Jansenism.

A Mystery that is approached in so one-sided and at times even psychologically unsound a way gradually becomes suspect. Neither the artist nor the woman, I would venture to say, really feels at home in the traditional ascetic teaching and practice. A Mystery that has to be found in such tortuous and tortured ways loses its appeal. Add to this the temptation to secularize and rationalize every department of life, and we have our present situation. However, one thing is certain:

There can be no human life, no living Church without the "Mystery." The preoccupation with Eastern forms of mysticism is only another proof of this. Your existentialist may endeavor to demythologize the world; that Mystery which he is unable to discover in the world outside, in the macrocosm, is equally at work in the microcosm of his own heart. The Eastern Church with its Jesus prayer, which establishes the connection between the outside world of the head—in this context even rational thought is "outside"—and the inner world of the heart has always known this. The discovery of the heart and its *mystique* is only in its early stages. Attempts are being made both in France and in Switzerland to develop a form of religious instruction for girls which is more suited to the needs of those whose characteristic it is to possess "*un coeur qui pense et un esprit qui aime.*"

It may well be that the erosion of the Mystery as it has hitherto been approached and apprehended in the West is the condition ensuring a development of a second form of spiritual *askesis*, which together with the traditional form will do justice to the human psyche in its totality as partaking of both male and female traits. Meanwhile it is imperative to emphasize the fact that there *is* a Mystery and that it can be discovered. "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

# The New Gnosticism

*Charles Carroll*

Of all the various revolutions now under way in the world, there is one which Charles Carroll finds particularly disturbing—a church revolution whose slogan seems to be “justification by scholarship alone.” This “new gnosticism” advances a doctrine which “would require stewards to be relevant first rather than faithful” and “would place a premium upon man’s reason at the cost of his feelings and his spirit.” Over against such a doctrine Father Carroll stresses the need for balance, self-discipline, ministry to the whole man, receptivity to the revelation of God in Christ. Connected to the Episcopal Diocese of California for the past twelve years, Father Carroll is Protestant chaplain to students and faculty at the University of California’s San Francisco Medical Center and executive director of the Center for Human Values in the Health Sciences. Prior to entering the ministry he held positions in the fields of advertising and journalism. His essay first appeared in the May 1969 issue of *Worship*,\* a Benedictine-sponsored review concerned with the problems of liturgical renewal.

THE WORLD is undergoing not one but many revolutions. There is the revolution in values which is testing every cherished tradition and concept of the past. There is the revolution in world religions whose increasing concern with unity merely underscores the fragmentations that they are experiencing. There is the revolution in family life marked by a confusion in the role of the sexes, a rise in the divorce rate and in the number of families that legally married are factually separated, motherhood and parenthood having been robbed of so much of their one-time dignity that husband and

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wife seek status in the each other's eyes by working, acquiring more creature comforts and contenting themselves with material things at the cost of life together and time with their children. There is the technological revolution which has devised machines so "thoughtful" that their hour-by-hour, day-by-day "decisions" and influence upon management have made the popular elections held every two years almost meaningless. There is the cultural revolution which has led to such an amassment and continuous acquisition of knowledge *at such speed* that many in research are simply swept along by its momentum and all too often apply their newly won insights and powers without considering the effect these may have on man or the earth he inhabits. There is a revolution in man's concept of nation and nationalism. For as surely as the family gave way to the tribe, the tribe to the estates, and they, in turn, to the nation-state under Louis XIV, the nation-state—however reluctantly—is giving way to a sense of one world and the need for a world society.

There is a revolution in man's concept of himself—call it an explosion of conscience or consciousness—that leads him to demand the right of self-identification and to insist on recognition by his fellows of his own inherent dignity; yes, if forced to the choice, to prefer death standing on his feet rather than life on his knees, whatever his homeland or the color of his skin, whatever the name by which he worships God, wherever he lives, works, or studies. There is a revolution in sensitivity characterized by those who consider it their highest calling to be *human beings*, who would listen *and* hear, look *and* see, shape *and* fashion change, believing the future to be beyond their vision but not beyond their control,<sup>1</sup> and by those who are deaf and blind to any appeal for change, at one in their identification with and inflexible in their defense of the status quo, who simply remain oblivious of one of the truisms of history: the more rigid the structure, the more fragile and breakable it proves to be.

There is another revolution going on within the church, however, of which few seem to be aware, and that is a revolu-

tion beyond those involving discussions of the "new" theology and the "new" morality. That is the very real revolution in worship and it is not to be confused with those lesser changes concerned with experimental liturgies, music and vestments, for that would be to confuse "the suits and trappings" <sup>2</sup> with something far more profound and radical—the development of a new doctrine within the church of "justification by scholarship alone."

Peculiarly enough, this revolution is not anti-intellectual nor anti-emotional. Contrary to the dictum of St. Paul, however, it would require stewards to be relevant first rather than faithful. More amazing still, it is more clearly discernible by those outside the church than by many within.

Of course, there have been prophets within the household of faith. One, the late great Eivind Berggrav, Bishop Primate of Norway and a President of the World Council of Churches at the time of the Evanston Assembly in 1954, was heard to say of a particularly ponderous presentation by one of his Central European colleagues, "And the Word was made theology, and did *not* dwell among us." <sup>3</sup> Today, however, it is more those outside the family who discern the signs of the times.

Worship implies confession; confession, service; and service, discipline, and the Christian, whether married or unmarried, priest or layman, dare not forget this. Paderewski practiced hours every day. So did Kreisler, Casals, and Caruso. They believed that their particular art had meaning for men and for the better life. They dedicated themselves to it. They disciplined themselves in serving the purpose that they hoped to fulfill.

Surely, then, it must seem strange to the outsider to find the Roman Catholic Church questioning the wisdom of the celibate life at the very moment that the Protestant community of Taizé marks the thirteenth anniversary of its founding and its dedication to the unmarried life.

Still more strange, however, is the view of the unbeliever who insists that while both the married and unmarried priest-

hoods are valid, "in time of war the commander-in-chief needs an increasing number of men who can devote themselves exclusively to the soldier life." <sup>4</sup>

Sexuality can be the instrument of man's freedom or enslavement. A poor, black, male patient in a large midwestern county hospital, covered with dermatitis as the result of a venereal disease, recognized this truth with uncommon perceptivity when he said to the white chaplain, "I've been led around by my 'gotta haves' all my life," and the chaplain with no less uncommon candor and charity answered, "Don't segregate us." Man may "lose himself" (Mark 8:35) in marriage or celibacy and so find and free himself in a discipline that stems from his awareness of the meaning of life *for him*, but the man who would "save himself" (Mark 8:35) in the pursuit of an undiluted hedonism of license and libertinism, will surely destroy his freedom and himself in the process.

Many outside the Christian tradition have found value in the unmarried, contemplative life. The Buddhists provide one of the most notable examples. But now there are some outside any of the great traditional religions who have made the same discovery, some syncretists who, like the Christian Yoga Order in Virginia City, Nevada, live as "lifetime renunciates," monks and nuns, as "teachers, or 'catalysts' to spiritual unfoldment in others." <sup>5</sup> Sponsors of "Innersearch Switzerland 1968" during which members of the order and the Himalayan Academy, to which it is related, investigated the philosophy of Carl Gustav Jung, are now planning a 1969 International Yoga Convention at La Paz, Mexico. One of their stated purposes is "to meet and work with scientists, philosophers, educators, and other men creatively engaged in expanding the boundaries of human knowledge and consciousness; and to encourage the use and perfection of those techniques of mind *discipline* which lead to awareness, creativity, self-knowledge, and internal freedom." <sup>6</sup>

Discipline is no longer an ugly word. More and more mature adults are beginning to realize that when self-discipline

ends state-discipline begins; and freedom is lost when free men no longer believe it has a purpose.

Happily, discipline is also returning to our sense of worship. We have experienced the "shaking of the foundations" <sup>7</sup> within the church. We have sensed the "no ground beneath our feet" <sup>8</sup> of which Bonhoeffer wrote. But have we been willing to embrace the radical individualism of St. Ignatius Loyola who was among the first of the saints to bear the church upon his back rather than ask her to bear him upon her own? <sup>9</sup> As a son of the Lutheran Reformation and a priest of the Anglican communion, I would ask if we who stand outside the Roman communion have been willing to show that degree of self-discipline or that courage? We have—all of us—been and allowed ourselves to be too overwhelmed by the fragmentation of christendom, too little aware of the fact that only as we draw near to Christ, shall we draw near to one another, too appalled by the limits of our learning, too unappreciative of the enormities of his grace.<sup>10</sup>

The infrequency of interdisciplinary dialogue often blinds men to the real and increasing divisions within other disciplines. The Union of Concerned Scientists formed by a group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology belies the monolithic appearance with which the community of the life and physical sciences impresses the outsider. The late Otto Hahn, once director of the Max Planck Institute in Germany and one of the fathers of atomic fission, lived many years regretting the use made of his discoveries. Life scientists are experiencing a growing uneasiness in anticipation of the abuse that could be made of theirs.

A French scientist, Jean Charon, summed up the feelings of many of his colleagues in claiming,

Man's roots go down into religion, and thanks to science he rises even to greater heights; but no tree has ever been secure without roots; and the taller the trees, the deeper the roots must be. Man sees things from a lofty standpoint, and his vision ranges far afield; but he feels the ground very insecure beneath his feet. It would seem to be high time for him to

pause and reflect, and put down some roots into the heart of his problem, to take new hold on the universe *revealed* by religion; for surely the great evil of our times is that we have too much knowledge and too little love.<sup>11</sup>

At a time when many within the church would disavow any real difference between faith and reason and others would claim that revelation having entered history is subsumed by reason, Charon's comments upon a "universe *revealed* by religion" and his description of our age as one of "too much knowledge and too little love" should recall us in the church to the fullness of that faith "once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) by a God of love to whom we come to a living relationship by the self-same faith (which Alan Richardson describes as "objective truth subjectively appropriated") nourished and sustained through worship.

Into the mouth of the abbé in the *Song of Bernadette*, Franz Werfel introduced some wise words, "To him who believes, no explanation is necessary; to him who does not, no explanation suffices." However learned man becomes, reason will take him only so far. Beyond that point, he will have to invent a mythology of his own which causes him to deny the Name at which "every knee shall bow" (Phil. 2:10) but leads him to remove his hat on ascending the steps of the Lincoln Memorial or descending to Lenin's tomb; which would deny that there is any cross to bear or Anyone to follow, but would sacrifice everything including life itself for the "American way of life" or the attainment of an earthly eschaton identified with the "withering away of the state" (Karl Marx); that ridicules the mass but demands participation in the "liturgies" incidental to swearing allegiance to the flag or undying loyalty to the state, or to observing the parades held to observe the Fourth of July or the October Revolution. Still, the light that "shines on in the dark" is one which "the darkness has never quenched" (John 1:5).

Whatever men choose to call that light, Tertullian was quite right in ascribing all good works to the Holy Spirit. And as man's roots in history are submitted to ever closer scrutiny,



as scholars such as Joseph Campbell in his monumental three-volume work on *The Masks of God* move through a fully documented critique of the collective unconscious that questions the theory of parallelism and raises the possibility of cultural diffusionism, and as others such as Kreckler at the University of Münster in Germany labor in the compilation of a Sumerian-Akkadian dictionary, we may well find that man, moving in his history from the simple to the complex, experiences in the present complexification of all life a restoration of that unity that he had lost in settling in different parts of the world at different times, fashioning different cults and cultures, and different languages in spite of his common heritage. The building of the tower of Babel and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost have this in common, that man is not so much the treasure as the "earthen vessel" (II Cor. 4:7) through which the treasure flows. Man's awareness of and receptivity to the treasure is essential to spiritual health as well as worship, the spiritual life, and unity with his fellow-men.

Witness to this truth is Dr. Ludwig Lefebre of San Francisco, an existential psychologist, student of Heidegger and Jaspers, associate of Medard Boss and Ludwig Binswanger: Lefebre welcomes the priest as counselor<sup>12</sup> but deplores that misconception of his role which often leads him to ape the psychotherapist rather than bring his fellow humans to an intimate sense of and relationship with the extrahuman.

German born, of Jewish heritage, Lefebre's wide-ranging mind has still further implications for the worship life of the church. He regrets the disappearance of sin from modern man's vocabulary. There *is* evil in the world and he fears that too great concern with guilt complexes overlooks the reality of guilt and fails to distinguish between guilt that is false and guilt that is real.

A Lutheran pastor friend attests to this truth in telling the story of a woman who came to his office several years ago to ask if he heard confessions. He assured her that he did, but since she was a complete stranger to him, he asked "Why?"

She simply replied that she and her husband had been having difficulties, that, by common agreement, she had sought psychiatric help, and that after three years in therapy she still believed that the real solution to her problem lay in absolution. He heard her confession, pronounced the absolution, and saw her and her husband become regular attendants at the services of worship of his congregation. She had become a whole person, enjoying a full life.

To be sure, incredible advances are being made in pharmaceutical research that will alleviate if not cure many mental illnesses, but guilt, real guilt will remain a gnawing problem for the church and psychiatry for a long time: for psychiatry until it grasps the Wholly Other who is offended by the injury done any other, and for the church until she more readily appreciates the inescapable fact that confession *is* good for the soul and turns from the mechanical and logical to the psychological and pastoral in the profoundest sense—to which St. Paul gave such eloquent testimony in admitting that the “good I would, I do not and the evil I would not, I do” (Rom. 7:19) and St. Augustine in sharing his *Confessions*.

When a young resident in psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center asked for my guidance in what he termed “your literature,” I was startled by his response to my asking “Why?” “Because,” he replied, “Freud and Jung made one basic presupposition that was false. This was to assume that man had a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Their primary objective in therapy, therefore, was to remove the obstacles that kept man from the attainment of his goals. That simply is no longer true. Man has lost his way.”

To be sure, standardized, packaged, traditional christianity, untouched by the *aggiornamento* and *caritas* of John XXIII, suffers many of the same dehumanizing and depersonalizing tendencies as the world in which we live, but man’s quest for a faith to live by goes on, however unique the forms it may take, however implicit rather than explicit the needs that it seeks to satisfy.

When a distinguished psychiatrist can contemplate a work

on the "father image" in the Psalms and still admit that this may spring from man's natural, implanted need to worship, should we who are priests not be somewhat more humble in viewing the increasing popular interest in extrasensory perception and psychic phenomena—in short, all those factors for which we have not yet devised scientific models for study—as evidence of man's concern with the nontraditional and extrahuman, however much we may be inclined to dismiss them as nothing more than wish-fulfillment, anxiety-antidotes and security-seeking projections of our minds.

There is the intellect, but there are the emotions and, beyond them, the spirit, on which in a very real sense human destiny depends. Obviously, there are limits to man's freedom. The same is true of the organist. He has so many manuals, registers, pedals, and pipes at his command, but within that range he may choose to play a military march or a hymn of praise.

The movement of seminaries toward closer proximity to and identification with great universities is another indicator of the church's growing acceptance of the doctrine of "justification by scholarship alone." But the need is not for priests who are scholars alone but scholars who submit to the discipline of the triologue of worship regularly—the triologue of communion with God and service to his people.

After the Reformation in Europe, Luther found only state universities available to him for the training of his clergy. Today, in those German universities which have faculties of theology, the emphasis is far more on study than on worship, the student congregations making use of a local church from time to time; but for the most part theology is viewed by many as just another secular discipline. Whatever one's appraisal of St. Augustine, his prayer of long ago is uniquely relevant today: "Let [thy servants] not be so given to contemplation that they neglect the good of their neighbors, nor so far in love with action that they forget divine speculation nor aim for power and honor in action."

The revolution in worship we are now experiencing comes perilously close to destroying this much-needed balance, and the present emphasis upon *glossolalia* within the church need surprise no one who sees in "justification by scholarship alone" a doctrine which would place a premium upon man's reason at the cost of his feelings and his spirit. Jesus, the Man for others, came not to minister to a part of man but rather to minister to the whole man.

Sometimes we in the church forget this. When some within the church say that they do not know what prayer means and even some bishops have implied that it may be nothing more than autosuggestion, it is comforting to know that some psychiatrists commend *The Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross to their patients. In darkness, one most easily discerns the light.

If Deutero-Isaiah could speak of Cyrus as the "anointed" (Isa. 45:1), perhaps it is time that we ask ourselves if Darwin, Marx, and Freud are no less the Lord's anointed. Without Darwin, we might very well never have known Teilhard de Chardin; without Marx, we might very well never have known *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Pacem in Terris* and *Populorum Progressio* as an alternative to fascism and communism; and without Freud, we may very well have been much slower in rediscovering the significance of Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard.

Married or unmarried, we are priests—by ordination or by confirmation, which is the sacrament of ordination of the laity. Married or unmarried, we must discipline ourselves if we are to be free to love, to love him who "first loved us" (I John 4:19) and to love those with whom he set us, "the solitary in families" (Ps. 68:6, King James Version), the family of God, that of our own mother and father, and that, in later years, of our own house. This love which is born of faith and sustained by hope, is nourished by worship. This worship of a one and at the same time transcendent and immanent deity (what meaning would he have if he were immanent but not transcendent or conversely, transcendent but not immanent?)

in the eucharistic liturgy, this re-presentation of his sacrifice, this reassurance not that we are loved because we are lovable but rather lovable because we are loved; these enable us to live, to live with the "evil that we would not, that we do and the good that we would that we do not" and to accept ourselves because we are accepted. These also call us—the whole us—to union with the Wholly Other in whose service there is perfect freedom and meaning and purpose.

To cite Paul Tillich, we "cannot reach God by the work of right thinking or by a sacrifice of the intellect or by a submission to strange authorities, such as the doctrines of the church and the Bible. [We] cannot, and [we] are not even asked to try it. Neither works of piety nor works of morality nor works of the intellect establish unity with God. They follow from this unity, but they do not make it. They even prevent it if you try to reach it through them. But just as you are justified as a sinner . . . , so in the status of *doubt* you are in the status of truth. And if all this comes together and you are desperate about the meaning of life, the seriousness of your despair is the expression of the meaning in which you still are living. This unconditional seriousness is the expression of the presence of the divine in the experience of utter separation from it. . . . The radical and universal interpretation of the idea of justification through faith had important theological consequences beyond the personal. If it is valid, no realm of life can exist without relation to something unconditional, to an ultimate concern. Religion, like God, is omnipresent; its presence, like that of God, can be forgotten, neglected, denied. But it is always effective, giving inexhaustible depth to life and inexhaustible meaning to every cultural creation." <sup>13</sup>

Romano Guardini has intimated that it was in seeking we already found, and in asking we were already given, seeking him and asking him at worship. Surely, scholarship is important. Saul of Tarsus was a scholar. But surely receptivity to the revelation of God in Christ is no less important. It was on the road to Damascus and in Damascus at prayer that Paul became Paul the Apostle.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, *To Seek a Newer World* (Bantam Books, 1968), p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.ii.76.

<sup>3</sup> *Time*, August 30, 1954, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> A comment made by a member of the faculty at the Faculty Club of the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center, June 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Prospectus of Christian Yoga Order, Virginia City, Nevada.

<sup>6</sup> Articles of Incorporation approved by the Secretary of State of Nevada.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundation* (Scribners, 1948).

<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Macmillan, 1967), II.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Rahner in a conversation at Alma College, November 1967.

<sup>10</sup> These thoughts are due to Thomas Sartory, formerly of Niederaltaich in Bavaria, and Bishop Anders Nygren of Lund, Sweden.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Charon, *Man in Search of Himself* (Walker & Company, 1963).

<sup>12</sup> *Psychology Today* (November 1968), p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Phoenix Books, 1957), pp. xi-xii.

# The Place of Feeling in Religious Awareness

*Paul Rowntree Clifford*

What we need, contends Paul Rowntree Clifford, is another Friedrich Schleiermacher—a religious thinker who “will wrestle with the problems of the twentieth century in the light of the new insights provided by modern psychology and sociology.” Clifford grants that Schleiermacher’s definition of religion as “a feeling of absolute dependence” is vulnerable to the charge of erring on the side of subjectivity. Nonetheless, he argues, we must not lose sight of the important point that nineteenth-century theologian-philosopher was making, namely, that the emotions have a legitimate place in religion. “Unless revelation is related to the depths of human experience, it will not be revelation at all. It will be an abstraction.” Formerly Professor of Religion at McMaster College in Canada, Englishman Clifford returned to his homeland in 1965 to assume the presidency of Selly Oaks Colleges in Birmingham—an interdenominational federation of several colleges concerned with the training of candidates for the mission field, teacher training, child care and social work training, and non-vocational adult education. An ordained Baptist clergyman, Mr. Clifford is the author of *The Mission of the Local Church*, *The Pastoral Calling*, and *Now Is the Time: Changing Church Structures*. His article is from the October 1968 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Theology*.\*

THE TITLE of this paper inevitably suggests the approach to religious consciousness of the great nineteenth-century thinker, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who found the essence of religion in a feeling of absolute dependence. Like all

\* University of Toronto Press, Toronto 5, Ontario, Canada.

key words, "feeling" has to be given a precise connotation if confusion is to be avoided, and unfortunately Schleiermacher's use of the word was by no means free from ambiguity. According to one of his principal modern interpreters, he never clearly made up his mind whether it was a state of self-consciousness, implying a radical subjectivism in which the self was imprisoned within its own inwardness, or whether it was to be equated with what others have called "intuition." To quote H. R. Mackintosh: "There can be little doubt, I think, that Schleiermacher *intended* 'feeling' to be read in this second sense, and we must read it so wherever we can. But his argument often proceeds on the first sense."<sup>1</sup> However that may be, I propose to use "feeling" in the second sense, to denote a mode of awareness underlying and reaching beyond all our conceptual thinking and all our attempts at articulation.

If we are to understand "feeling" in this way, the question arises whether it should be equated with sense experience, or, if not, how it should be related to the latter. We are at once faced with widespread disagreement, not to say sheer confusion, amongst philosophers in the empirical tradition, about the role of sentience in our knowledge of anything. At the reductionist extreme there are those who believe that all awareness is simply a physical response of the nervous system to external stimulus. But this view raises insuperable problems, not the least of which is that in our claim to perceive anything we go beyond whatever is immediately presented to the senses. Any attempt to isolate the physically given breaks down through the sheer necessity of apprehending it within a larger context, and this means that we cannot reduce knowledge to mere sentience. Once that has been conceded, we are driven to think of the senses as the *medium* through which we became aware of a world that is other than ourselves; and the inevitability of using such prepositions as "though," "by," or "in" opens a door to metaphysics which many contemporary empiricists seem bent on keeping closed.

Sentience as such, therefore, can be nothing other than an



immediate response to an immediate stimulus, and this falls far short of the most diffuse awareness we have of our environment. Until it becomes the vehicle of consciousness which reaches beyond the immediate sensation, sentience does not qualify to be regarded as a mode of awareness, except in a most embryonic fashion. Accordingly, if "feeling" is to be recognized as having any significant place in human knowledge, it must be given a wider connotation than mere sentience, and this is surely what Schleiermacher intended.

At the same time, "feeling" is to be clearly distinguished from conceptual thinking, as a mode of apprehension which is more primitive both in terms of the biological evolution of the human race and also in terms of individual consciousness. In the evolutionary process living things became sensitive to their environment long before the capacity for conceptual thinking emerged, and it is not unreasonable to postulate a stage of awareness which was more than mere sentience and yet fell short of conceptual clarity. The process is reproduced in every human being. Our feeling of what is other than ourselves originates in the relationship of the fetus to its mother, is dominant in the early stages of infancy, and persists through every stage of development as the substratum of all knowledge that we subsequently acquire.

Therefore, to claim, as some do, that the only mode of knowledge is formal categorizing seems to me to be a cardinal error and an unwarranted limitation of human cognition. If there are thoughts too deep for words, there are feelings or apprehensions too deep for formal thinking, and surely this is psychologically self-evident to anyone who reflects upon his own experience. We are first of all aware of that which we have to struggle to conceptualize and express, and this process often involves a great deal of trial and error, not to speak of pain and labor, as every writer knows.

This point may be illustrated from our stumbling attempts to put our thoughts into words. When we want to explain a difficult and complicated idea to someone else, do we not frequently change the form of expression to convey our

meaning? It is common to hear someone explain, "No, you have misunderstood me. I did not mean to say X, but to say Y. Let me put it another way: suppose you think of Z . . . ." This form of speech clearly does not just indicate that there are different ways of saying the same thing, some more or less misleading than others; it suggests that there is something we know we want to communicate, but for which all language patterns that we can devise are relatively unsatisfactory. If this is the case with the translation of thought into speech, it is no less so with the attempt to conceptualize our diffuse apprehensions.

Feeling, then, in the sense in which I am using the word, is that diffused awareness of a reality which ultimately defies conceptualization, breaking through all our categories of thought and shattering them by the very richness of its content. At the same time it is amenable to limited comprehension. For the most part, however, we are not wrestling with conceptual clarification—not even if we are philosophers. Our awareness of that which is other than ourselves is blurred and confused, and it is only by selective concentration that we make any progress in understanding. To put the point another way, this diffused awareness of reality is the womb out of which reflective consciousness develops. It underlies and pervades the whole of human experience.

If this is true of man's general awareness of what is other than himself, it is no less true of his awareness of God. The latter is basically a diffused recognition of transcendent mystery—the sense of the numinous, as Otto called it—which both precedes and underlies all attempts at theological clarification and discourse. Such a claim will, of course, provoke the rejoinder that this alleged awareness is illusory: we are imagining that we are conscious of transcendent mystery, whereas in fact we are simply projecting our own feelings of finitude onto an environment which is explicable in naturalistic terms. In other words, we are mistaken in supposing that there is anything to intuit, in Schleiermacher's second sense

of the word "feeling," and we are after all imprisoned within our own subjectivity.

I do not see that the question can be resolved at this level by any amount of argument. The issue at stake is whether the religious man's feeling of assurance ("feeling" in Schleiermacher's first sense) is a reflection of an authentic feeling, in the second sense, of that which is other than himself. Without what I have called "the feeling of assurance" we would not be convinced that we are aware of anything, and therefore what are commonly recognized as the emotional overtones of knowledge are a necessary concomitant of any diffused apprehension. But the emotional overtones do not of themselves guarantee the authenticity of any alleged intuition. In a certain advanced alcoholic state we may have an inward assurance about seeing pink elephants in the bedroom, but the mere feeling does not guarantee that such strange creatures exist. The problem is to know how we can be sure of our feelings in the intuitive sense.

Is the problem essentially any different from that of justifying our certainty of the existence of a world external to ourselves? Solipsism is a theoretical possibility, but we reject it on the ground that we cannot begin to account for our experience apart from the conviction that we are aware of a world that is not of our making, which dictates the kind of experience we have. Similarly, those who claim to be aware of the transcendent impinging upon them are maintaining that this experience is inexplicable on the presumption that it is self-induced. To argue that it is a byproduct of our rapport with our natural environment seems to be to explain away something that demands recognition in its own right and evokes a strength of assurance which cannot be gainsaid.

Only when the fundamental issue has been settled is it appropriate to ask whether the concepts and language we use in elucidating religious experience are logically coherent or not. Even if they are logically incoherent, as Antony Flew and others maintain,<sup>2</sup> that would not decide the question whether there is a basic experience which demands conceptual and

linguistic clarification. If Flew is right, then theists, and Christian theologians in particular, are faced with a formidable agenda requiring the most radical rethinking; but that fact does not of itself call in question the basic awareness to which I have referred.

This consideration leads me to ask how far contemporary Christian thought, language, and ritual are related to fundamental religious feeling, understood either as intuitive awareness or as the accompanying assurance of any intuition that is authentic. Have we to admit that they are in no small degree abstract and divorced from experience? Unless thought, language, and ritual elucidate the basic awareness of which I have been speaking and awaken the appropriate emotional response, they have no real anchorage. This is the dilemma confronting all those who wrestle with the problem of how to present the Christian faith in terms that are relevant to modern man. It is not a question, as is still commonly supposed, of translating the faith into language which is more intelligible to ordinary people. The problem is much more complex than that. It is how to relate the gospel to human feeling, to that all-pervasive substratum of awareness to which I have drawn attention. Until we realize that all attempts to speak to the intellect which do not grapple with underlying feelings will fail, we shall not make any real progress.

The fact is that most people do not *feel* that the church really meets them in either its teaching or its ritual. They have a sense of a great hiatus which is at a far deeper level than that of the intellect; it is at the very wellsprings of human life where emotion rules to a degree that most of us simply have not measured. For if emotional response is not evoked by the way in which the faith is articulated, we can be sure that the latter is not being related to any profound intuitive awareness. What is a commonplace in psychology has hardly come to the surface in ecclesiastical circles. By and large, church leaders have been frightened of facing the emotional basis of religion, lest they should be engulfed in the extravagances which have characterized the revivalist movements. So Christianity has

become intellectualized, and it is therefore not surprising that the church has generally appeared cold and aloof.

This reluctance to come to terms with the emotional depths of man's nature is compounded by the distrust shown by those of British extraction towards any display of feeling. To keep a stiff upper lip, to hide behind the façade of casual play-acting, to preserve the appearance of nonchalance at all costs—these have been associated with the image of respectability. "Thou shalt not expose thyself to other people" has been the unwritten first commandment of many in the Western world. And in many places the church has not unnaturally led the way in conforming to this standard.

But the Christian gospel is not addressed to the surface of life, to its conventionalities and its pretences. It is relevant to the whole man in the very depths of his being, and unless it breaks through to the inner springs of human nature and awakens the profoundest emotional response, it will obviously appear to be a hollow sham. One of the most significant phenomena in the contemporary religious scene is the spectacular growth of the Pentecostalist movement in almost every part of the world.<sup>3</sup> Whatever its theological deficiencies and uncontrolled enthusiasm, it does seem to have rung a bell in the hearts of a host of people to whom traditional churchmanship has made no appeal. This is a fact which it is sheer folly to ignore or to dismiss with superior indifference. It constitutes a challenge of the very first importance to any Christian thinking about renewal.

A typical illustration of my contention may be taken from a report in *The Sunday Times* following the publication of the findings of the tribunal set up to inquire into the disaster in the Welsh mining village of Aberfan.<sup>4</sup> One of those named as culpable was quoted as follows: "I've never said this to my wife, but there wasn't a night I didn't pray for help and somehow I was given it. I'm not religious, although I was baptized, but I was desperate sometimes and I've just tried to be a good Christian." What did he mean by saying that he wasn't religious? Did he mean that religion meant nothing to him until

after the slide of the coal tip at Aberfan? Or was he really implying that, as far as he was concerned, "religion" was associated with the institutional church and that this had never had any relevance for him? I believe that the second interpretation is in all probability the correct one, and that in any case it represents the attitude of a large proportion of the population, including a surprising number of those who do have some formal church allegiance. They do have a religious sense, however inarticulate or even dormant it may often be. The problem is how to relate the faith as it is taught and practiced by the church to this kind of awareness, from which it appears to be so remote.

This was essentially the question that Schleiermacher was asking, and he thought that he had found the key to answering it in what he called the feeling of dependence. No doubt he is open to the criticism that he has surrendered all objectivity when he claims that "all attributes which we ascribe to God are to be taken as denoting not something specific in God, but only something specific in the manner in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be related to Him."<sup>5</sup> As H. R. Mackintosh says, this can be taken to imply "that we merely pore over our own inward state and excogitate the idea of God which best answers to it."<sup>6</sup> But to go to the opposite extreme and claim that we have to start with the givenness of revelation means that all too easily we ignore the crucially important point that Schleiermacher was making. Unless revelation is related to the depths of human experience, it will not be revelation at all. It will be an abstraction.

What this means for theology, and not least for liturgical and pastoral studies, is another matter. We need another Schleiermacher who will wrestle with the problems of the twentieth century in the light of the new insights provided by psychology and sociology. In this paper I have been able to do no more than suggest a subject urgently requiring exploration. If the main thesis which I have been advancing is correct, obviously we have to pay far more serious attention than we commonly do to the nature of human feeling, and, in particu-

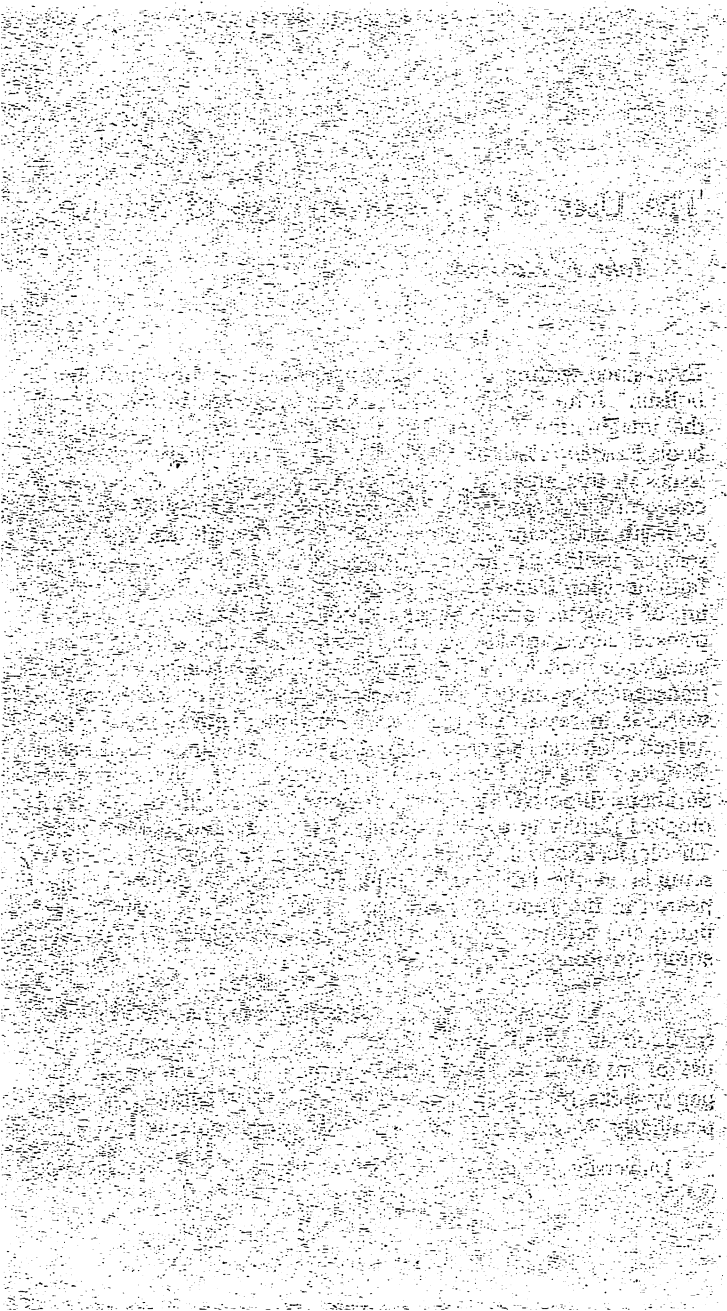
lar, we have to get rid of our reluctance to associate the emotions with the intellect in genuine religion.

### NOTES

1. H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1937), p. 48.
2. Cf. Antony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966).
3. Cf. Douglas Webster, *Pentecostalism and Speaking with Tongues* (London, Highway Press, 1964).
4. *The Sunday Times*, August 6, 1967.
5. F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), p. 194.
6. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

## *II. Myth and Models for Modern Man*





# The Uses of Myth in an Age of Science

*John F. Hayward*

Ever since writing a doctoral dissertation on "mythical symbolism," John F. Hayward has been interested in the uses of the imagination for the conveyance of religious insight; his book *Existentialism and Religious Liberalism* deals with many issues in this area. In the essay that follows, Dr. Hayward is concerned to demonstrate the inevitability and unavoidability of myth and transcendence even in a scientific age. Modern science itself was founded on a "transcendence model"—a faith decision transcending evidence—derived from the blending of Hellenic and biblical mythological themes; "to deny a transcendence model one must bring forward another transcendence model." At the same time, Hayward argues that the transcendence model that has long prevailed in the Western world is in need of radical criticism and renovation. An ordained Unitarian minister, Dr. Hayward has since 1968 been Religious Studies Director and Professor of Philosophy at Southern Illinois University. Previously he taught on the theological faculty at the University of Chicago and at Meadville Theological School. Originally given at a theology and science seminar at the latter institution, his paper subsequently appeared in the June 1968 number of *Zygon*,\* a journal of religion and science published jointly by Meadville and the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science.

A BASIC THEME of this paper is that the Western tradition has simultaneously encouraged and discouraged the use of mythical narratives and symbols. The method of the paper seeks to reveal some of the historical strands of this peculiarly Western ambivalence. The purpose of the paper is

\* University of Chicago Press, 5750 Ellis Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60637.

to point out certain implications for science and religion that might accrue from a clearer vision and freer appropriation of our mythological heritage.

David Bidney has stated the ambivalent role of myth in the modern world by reference to Bergson and to the later thoughts of Ernst Cassirer.<sup>1</sup> Bergson observes in his "two-sources" theory of religion and morality that "religion is a defensive reaction of nature against the dissolvent power of intelligence." This, Bidney argues, appears to support a truth theory of myth as a process in which the Cosmos or the Society of Life projects into human consciousness images of its own power and value via the medium of myth. Bidney finds a similar point of view in Cassirer's notion that the mythical consciousness is a distinct and creditable medium through which human experience expresses its own depths, ultimate values, and basic dependencies. On the other side of the coin, however, Bergson notes that rational and critical intelligence drives toward dissolving mythical images and loyalties into their component parts via empirical analysis. Critical intelligence stands outside the beliefs it examines and seeks to reduce them to the common coinage of non-mythical observation. In a like fashion, Cassirer, as Bidney observes, was attracted to a sociological theory of myth. According to this theory, myth expresses not the impact of cosmic process on human sensibilities but the effort of a given society to constitute itself as a unit. Myth is what society uses to symbolize its own center and the organization of its energies. The reality behind myth is social ritual and social behavior. The implication is that sooner or later societies will analyze their own forms consciously and critically; they will decide rationally for this or that structure or action; and they will gradually relegate into the background of history all mythical expression.

As a modern rationalist, Bidney favors this latter approach. He writes:

My conclusion is that while in times of crisis the "noble fiction" may have its immediate, pragmatic utility in promoting social faith and solidarity, faith in reason and in the ability of

democratic man to govern himself rationally requires a minimum of reliance upon myth. . . . Myth must be taken seriously precisely in order that it may be gradually superseded in the interests of the advancement of truth and the growth of human intelligence. Normative, critical, and scientific thought provides the only self-correcting means of combatting the diffusion of myth, but it may do so only on condition that we retain a firm and uncompromising faith in the integrity of reason and in the transcultural validity of the scientific enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

### *Transcendence Model*

It is worthy of note that Bidney presents his hope of the transition from myth to reason as a product of faith involving at least "a minimum reliance upon myth." It may be inaccurate to designate as myth this faith assumption in the essential value and triumph of reason. But there is a dimension to it which is not strictly empirical. It seems that Bidney will not compromise his faith in rational man—he will honor the hope of its ultimate validity. In theological language, this kind of faith decision could be called a *transcendence model*. It refers to a situation which transcends evidence, especially counter evidence in favor of rival systems. It transcends assurance, substituting hope and faith. It transcends time, for it is a program still to be fulfilled and yet treasured as being even now in process of fulfillment. It transcends verification, for it is a faith continually being tested and yet extending in principle beyond all verifying activity. It could be falsified and eventually might lose its imperial position. But falsification would never occur by virtue of a single exception. Quite the contrary, only a deadly flood of exceptions protracted over a long period of time without the occasional refreshment of a single verifying event would drive the faithful person to admit falsification. As long as a few verifying instances could be experienced from time to time, the faith would persist.

By the phrase "transcendence model" I do not mean to

refer to a mystical reality understood by esoteric means. Rather, I wish to connote a certain sense of reality serving as both the container and the contrasting foil into which and against which all the relativities and partial realizations of human perception and knowledge are projected. For an Einstein, the transcendence model would be the Ultimate Order toward which all our scientific and humanistic probabilities approach. For Tillich, it would be the Unconditional, "the God beyond the God of theism."<sup>3</sup> For a phenomenologist, it would be that point of contact where the creating mind and its enviroing structures occur as one identity. For a total skeptic or solipsist, the transcendence model would be no more than his own stream of consciousness. In each case, we would be dealing with what Schelling called "*das Unvordenkliche*," "that before which thought cannot penetrate." Transcendence models are models in the sense of being selections of certain loci and forms out of the whole arsenal of human awareness and symbolism. They are transcendent in that they are not justified in terms of any prior reasons or realities but are affirmed, in their own right, as the ultimate ground and reach of human understanding.

One feature of the intellectual history of the West is that it has gradually "demythologized" its discourse by converting mythical transcendence models (concrete narratives of gods and men) into abstract transcendence models (general principles underlying systems of thought). In this process, scraps of myth continue to remain, even in modern discourse. I shall argue that in many respects a more concrete, narrative-style transcendence model may be better suited to modern sensibilities than the abstract transcendence models we habitually use. In short, demythologizing has proceeded far enough. It may now be time, even while guarding the critical intelligence, to consider remythologizing.

Let us observe a few points important for the history of myth and demythologization. In primitive society, as Mircea Eliade has pointed out, the principal function of religion and its myths is to transcend the "terror of time."<sup>4</sup> Time is the

measure of decay, and the whole world is caught in time's irresistible drive toward non-being. Parallel to and transcendent over the expected tragedies of history and the decay of all things through time, the archaic mind envisions an eternal realm of perfection and fulfillment. This is the realm of the gods, the immortals, and their prototypical dramas of eternal goodness and value. The aim of ritual is for the people to achieve periodic identification with the divine realm leading to periodic refreshment of the temporal realm. The aim of myth is to remember and retell the archetypal events which the ritual re-enacts and by which, through mystical participation of the people, the earth and the tribe are renewed and the terror of time is overcome. Thus, myth and ritual, with their guardian priesthood, constitute the link between time and eternity. And the effect of a tribal experiencing of the link is not simply reinvigoration or the transcendence of defeat; it is also paradigmatic, giving to the tribe renewed instruction in the divine prototypes for the conduct of every significant aspect of life. Thus, myth and ritual confirm a primal history, enunciate a crucial religious vision and faith, and declare the foundations for an extensive law, art, and technology.

The key point I wish to emphasize is that primitive culture is not perceived as complete in itself, but rather as established, informed, and guided by a transcendent realm and reality which it is supposed to imitate. This process is largely inherited, dogmatic, resistant to criticism and change, conservative. By the very rigidity of its character, the archaic mind raises the question of its own reformation.

### *From Mythos to Logos— the Greek Transcendence Model*

Werner Jaeger has documented in impressive detail the gradual shift from the mythological to the philosophic mind in his *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*.<sup>5</sup> In places and periods of social change and intersocietal com-

munication were born the beginnings of autonomous philosophical reasoning, still heavily dependent on mythical images but beginning to reconstruct these images into abstract and universal principles. After the several generations of gradual demythologizing among the pre-Socratics, Plato emerged as a highly sophisticated rationalist who had gone a long way from mythos to logos. Plato sought to rule mythological tales out of the ideal state and its education and to substitute a thoroughgoing deductive reasoning proceeding from the archetypes of reason to a judgment over the relative validity of all phenomena. Yet he was not able to cleanse the thought world he inhabited of all myth, nor could he bring to completion the anti-mythical trend begun by his predecessors. I refer not only to his use of specific myths at the climax points of certain dialogues, but also to the essential transcendence model in his thinking. Having been influenced by Pythagoras (as well as the Orphic myths which are woven into Pythagorean culture), he proceeded to affirm the reality of a realm of divine and immortal perfection expressed in terms of Unity or the One. This is the true source and ultimate destiny of man's immortal soul. True reasoning leads toward this destiny by preparing man for it; but the ultimate fulfillment waits upon death and the release of the soul from the corporeal realm. Even in the late dialogues, the image of a realm of transcendent and unchanging perfection is dominant.

The nature of Plato's Ultimate Unity (the One) is critical for understanding much of Western thinking, including scientific thinking. Its key characteristic is the image of changelessness. "Everything which is good, whether made by art or nature or both, is least liable to suffer change from without" (*Republic*, 381<sup>b</sup>). This is a true transcendence over what Eliade refers to in primitive society as "the terror of time." Nothing qualifies the perfection of the One. Nor is it qualified by any inner tensions, needs, or dynamics. It is all in all, being beyond every particular and being the primordial fulfillment of every potentiality. Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is completely compatible with Plato's One. In both instances, there

is purposeless Reality (purposeless because it has nothing unfulfilled within it), a Reality absolutely dependable in its constancy and undifferentiated in its quality. It transcends all phenomena, even as all phenomena are subtly moved to try to approach its perfection. Only in the highest rationality does any temporal reality approach this vision of true perfection. Even then, for all of its accessibility to reason, the One remains a mystical fullness to which a man can only briefly and never constantly attain.

I suggest that the key transcendence model of Hellenic rationalism is a mixture of myth and abstraction: the abstract part is the perfection of changelessness; the mythical part, which is both concrete and dramatic, is the depiction of changelessness as a realm from which the immortal soul is primordially derived and to which the rationally purified soul may aspire, above the flux of events and the terror of time. Although Aristotle gave birth to a non-Platonic empiricism, to a fresh interest in the realm of concrete phenomena, his basic world view was more nearly Platonic in the fashion we have been describing. For Aristotle, the examination of details was for the sake of confirming eternal essences arranged in an ascending hierarchy of degrees of changelessness.

What is the connection between Plato's and Aristotle's rationalism and modern scientific rationality? It must be granted that Aristotle's bias in behalf of deductive reason stands in sharp contrast to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century origins of science, where empirical facts were given the chance to alter rather than merely confirm rational principles. But even here, certain elements of the transcendence model of changeless unity remained. Right through the time of Newton and beyond, the Greek image of a single, rationally co-ordinated world unity persisted. It was no longer seen as pure, undifferentiated, or unaffected by phenomena. But it represented an eternal framework of cosmic law and order, the internal dynamics of which caused no ultimate fracture in its outer boundaries. Even Einstein, the father of the theory of relativity, retained a faith in the ultimately rational orderli-



ness of all process, seeing disjunctions in scientific explanation as a function of human ignorance rather than of ontological paradox.

This Hellenism is antimythical in the sense that it rules out all the drama of primitive Greek myths. The caprice of the gods, the darkness of fate, the mysteries of divine judgment, the tragic suffering of human men and heroes, the strange combinations of order and chaos in all events—all this became anathema. The myth of a fulfilled and perfect realm, of the soul's high destiny and reason's noble struggle, took the place of all the darker myths of an earlier time. In order thus to demythologize their culture, these rationalists had to discover new foundations in a broad and subtle myth far less vulnerable, in their eyes, to question or challenge than the myths they had overthrown. There was no question to them that the scheme they believed in was *logos*, not *mythos*. They believed they had transcended all myth. From our vantage point, we see them substituting one myth for a whole variety of other myths.

### *From Many Gods to One— the Judaic Transcendence Model*

The same critical disavowal of myth (even while holding to a normative and dominant myth) seems to have occurred in the other mainstream of Western history, in biblical thought. Against the myths of many gods, the ancient Jews defended their faith in one God. Against the pagan tendency to humanize the deeds of divinity, Jahweh looms as infinitely distant, invisible, mysterious, unanalyzable, and unassailable. Against the claims of rival tribes for their own magic and magical ritual, claims with which the Jews were surrounded, the Bible simplifies the relationship to Jahweh in terms of obedience to his law and petition for his mercy. Against the tendency to equate human and divine values characteristic of the mythical mind, the Jews saw the possibility of unexplain-

able suffering (as in the Book of Job) and the possibility of God's controversy even with his chosen ones. Their covenant between God and man was not presumed to be a magical instrument for the compelling of divine favor. It was held in faith, and the rewards of its faithful keeping were finally ascribed to God's judgment, not to man's.

In short, the Jews' rejection of idolatry and their exaltation of the one God bound to man not through the subtleties of high reasoning but through the keeping of a covenant of righteousness combined to produce a critical attitude toward the welter of mythology in the pagan world. But obviously the Jews did not escape myth; they advanced it and, from the point of view of our own world view, they purified it.

### *The Christian Synthesis—the Transcendence Model That Gave Birth to Science*

The blending of Hellenic and biblical mythological themes is possible because of the demythologizing tendencies of each. The Jews believed in the ultimate lordship of the one God, in power and wisdom. It was not difficult for the Alexandrian church fathers to graft this vast image onto the Hellenic vision of the One. The suffering of men of faith, epitomized in the homelessness of the Jews, in the Passion of Christ, and in the death of the martyrs, found ready compensation in the Hellenic vision of a pure realm, transcendent over all and the eternal home of all faithful and purified souls. Although this doctrinal system looks highly complex from our vantage point, it is a common theme from Tertullian, through Augustine, to Luther that Christian doctrine is extremely simple, direct, and comprehensible, that it is a truth thoroughly cleansed of all the speculations and bizarre imaginations of pagan myth. What classical and biblical culture held in common was vision of an orderly and reasonable cosmos and of a rightful and exalted place for man in the midst of it.

Upon the firm foundations of this comprehensive tran-

scendence model, modern science was founded. But in the process of the development of science, the Platonic influence strikes me as dominant even though it has been considerably modified. Against the flux of time, science, in its early and classical stages, sought to find quasi-permanent structures which it calls laws. Against the diversity of phenomena, science sought to push its researches back to the ultimate building blocks, the atoms or uncuttable elements of reality. Against the vagaries of human free will and man's wandering or unfulfilled purposes, science sought to construe reality as ordered rather than capricious and as determined rather than spontaneous. The picture of an ordered cosmos having its own being freed from anthropomorphic purposes is quite akin to Plato's vision of the One, which has no purposes because it needs none. From this vantage point, the anthropomorphisms of the biblical Jahweh look excessively mythical. It is not surprising that biblical theology was made more abstract and impersonal and qualified in an Aristotelian direction by such diverse thinkers as Maimonides, Aquinas, and Spinoza.

Is there anything left of this largely Hellenic and partially biblical vision in science today? I should say a good deal, although one must take care to note the differences. One must lop off the old Platonic hope for an ecstatic vision of the One. But we keep the image of a co-ordinated and purposeless system, details of which are available to our partial and never perfect understanding. We lop off the biblical image of God the Judge and Redeemer, but we keep the notion that in the course of time natural selection "decides" what is capable of survival and what must cease to perpetuate its kind. In a Platonic fashion, we argue that the way to acquaintance with and use of the stable orders of the cosmos is the way of knowledge, although we lop off the idea of a direct connection between mind and the Ideal and we substitute the necessity to invent and test models drawn from empirical observation. We keep the biblical sense of a linear history, of an evolution in time moving toward higher forms, but we lop off the idea that God foresees and plans this drama in advance. Instead, we

substitute the idea of random variation and natural selection in place of human purpose and divine judgment. Finally, if we are asked what is the meaning of the whole process as far as man is concerned, some may give a quasi-Socratic answer—insight; others may give a quasi-biblical answer—survival; still others may give no answer and avow that none can be found.

The foregoing transcendence model of science has or had mythical elements going back to original Greek and biblical habits of perception and symbolism. Surviving fragments of myth may be noted (1) in the conception of the laws of nature, implying the drama of a governing agency promulgating its decrees; (2) in the conception of natural selection, implying the drama of a cosmic editing or judging or deciding of relative survival powers; and (3) in the concept of evolution toward a higher, more complex structure of reality, implying the drama of a history moving *toward* (if not directly to) a climax point.

### *Can We Avoid Myth and Transcendence?*

It is clear that portions of biblical and/or Hellenic myth remain in the modern mind and color its understanding. However, just as the Greeks, the Jews, and the Christians, each in their way, tried to purify the myths of previous ages, let us now ask whether the remnants of so-called purified mythology among us may not finally be expunged. Such a process would in effect end forever any doctrine of transcendence. We would cease to say that there is a process indirectly revealed to us through mythological symbols selected from, but transcending, the phenomenal world. Can this be done?

One would have to give up any image of a stable and orderly reality transcending human consciousness. The only order would be the provisional order of human behavior, both active and symbolic. The coordination of symbol and act would refer to human impulses and responses; no further than

that. History, whether of groups or of individuals, would be stripped of all purpose and all progress. In other words, history would mean nothing beyond the transitory "meaning" fleetingly bestowed on selected moments by individuals. Each moment would thus be freed to mean whatever it might chance to mean. And each moment would mean different things to different people.

Such a world view would be so close to chaos that it would be very difficult to resist a counteracting intrusion of transcendence models in the form of covert mythical images. Thus, one would have to guard against the rise of the image of mankind as though mankind were a definable entity. One's ethics, law, and custom would need constantly to be defended from a priori categorization. One would need to depend for standards of value ultimately upon the impulse of each human agent and the degree to which that impulse were qualified by other agents and the environment. One would have to conclude that what one values is a function of (1) what one wants and (2) what one is enabled and permitted to have by his environment. One would have to chase away the remnants of a myth of the soul (which says that one's individuality is sacred or worthy *in se*); one would also have to chase away a myth of the neighbor (which claims that what one encourages or prevents in others is equally subject to sacred consideration).

Emerson's word that "man is a myth-bearing tree" is confirmed in the subtle prevalence and persistence, even in this scientific age, of transcendence models containing concrete and dramatic elements. The very rationalism that seeks to substitute a total logos for all mythos makes its appeal to a hidden transcendence model. In this model, the human brain is given some position of judgment over the flux of events out of which, as part of a living organism, it arises and operates. It asks for a self-contained transcendence over the rival conceptions of its own environmental involvement, claiming to judge the relative validity of rival transcendence models (e.g., Marxism, Freudianism, behaviorism, etc.). The brain presses ever steadily toward the goal of understanding its own proc-

esses, as though it were really two realities: (1) an objective thinking machine whose operations can be measured and predicted; (2) a subjective thinker who can make judgments about everything, including the objective thinking machine. This is a real transcendence model, namely, the picture of a brain transcending and knowing itself.

It may be objected that any world view or system of values which remains within the human sphere should hardly be called transcendent, especially in view of the fact that it maintains a modest reserve toward cosmic belief or universal speculation. Nonetheless, although it appears to be more modest than its predecessors, it is actually less so. It says that man is the true and sole author of his own destiny. Further, it exalts not man in general but rational, conscious, deliberate, scientific man; and it relegates to positions of lesser importance and authority all the other faces and facets of man which we have come to acknowledge within man's brief history. The devotees of scientific rationalism put their faith ultimately in man's conscious self rather than his unconscious self, in his decisive behavior rather than his unpremeditated behavior, in his reason rather than his instinct, in his observational and analytical skills rather than his artistic and synthetic skills. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, basic trust is lodged in a presupposed harmony of the brotherhood of all rational men. Such a model thus transcends a huge weight of counter-evidence and a huge volume of despair, cynicism, and radical doubt in the minds of all who do not share the faith. Of all the transcendence models of our time, one of the least logical, least empirical, least credible is that of autonomous, scientific man providing successfully, over the passage of time, for his own well-being.

### *A Transcendence Model for Our Day*

Our argument is arriving at two critical considerations. The first is that to deny a transcendence model one must bring forward another transcendence model. The second is that the

particular transcendence model that has largely prevailed for a long time among the intelligentsia of the Western world is in need of radical criticism and renovation. Our choice is not whether we shall commit our allegiance to any transcendence model at all, but which model most nearly reflects the full range of our experience and is therefore most worthy of our loyalty.

The major characteristic feature of the modern experience of reality is its dynamism. Therefore, any credible transcendence model in our day must point to a process rather than any allegedly eternal or static reality. Even if the new model retains the older abstract principle that the whole is one, its unity must be sharply qualified. It will be an associative or societal model of unity, having infinite internal divisions and partial disjunctions. The One may be eternal, but it does not exist as eternally the same. It will be envisaged as having a history with evolving potentialities moving toward fulfillment and with dying actualities moving toward extinction. Nothing in it is a finished perfection. There are no ultimate "building blocks," no invariant and timeless "achievements." In developing novelty while remaining ultimately harmonious, it is value-creating and value-sustaining. Its "aim" is to endure while changing, to sustain unity while experimenting with new forms. Although it is coordinated with respect to broad limits of possibility, it is highly random and experimental within these limits.

It begins to appear that the cosmic process in which man dwells exhibits features parallel to man's features. Just as man experiments with novelty and waits to see "whether it will work"—that is, whether his novel action can make sense in coordination with wider ranges of action—so all life has its random experiments, its persistence in new styles, its governance within the surrounding ecologies, its judgments of success or failure, life or death. Furthermore, we can push this organismic analogy from the living to the non-living on the assumption that the adjustment of inorganic environments is both coordinated and random, that such environments con-

tain unrealized potentialities waiting for actualization, that life itself is an emergent out of non-life. Ultimately, life and non-life in this model are one, not by the degrading of life into something other than itself, but rather by the lodging of both the living and the non-living in a single creative and dynamic matrix.

To proceed in this direction calls up the image of the living God and requires that one use symbols that are in some respects anthropomorphic. The justification for such usage is partially phenomenological: that is, human beings will filter their realizations through essentially human media. This is to acknowledge that the process which produces and sustains man is at least as complex and rich in texture as man himself, plus much more which in its ultimate transcendence man knows nothing of. Beyond himself, man can only suppose an infinite complexity. Thus, the images in this transcendence model become more biblical and less Hellenic, more mythic and less abstract.

Once it is considered possible, as well as desirable, to construe the universe in quasi-human images as well as in impersonal terms, further basic principles emerge, this time in rather more mythical than abstract symbols: (1) The whole is ultimately worthy of being rather than unworthy or neutral. Its claim upon our respect and service requires us to accept our own being within the whole, however difficult its details may be. We are not free to be a law or value unto ourselves; we are not free to secede from the process out of which we come. (2) The whole is worth living for, in the sense that our contributions are preserved in their actual relevance beyond our lives and beyond our knowing. The imagery of struggle, triumph, reverse, disaster and renewal in man provides a model for the quasi-historical adventure of all of nature, in part and in the whole. The entire cosmos is cast in the form not of a system but of a drama, in which vast issues are slowly developing and undergoing crisis and renewal. A man's or a society's place in this drama is not a matter of indifference, but is portentous with consequences for good and for ill. The



fact that the details of the drama are partially revealed and partially hidden is no excuse for withdrawal or irresponsibility. Just as the individual in each evolving species plays out its "role" to the utmost in the hope and faith that its individual vigor and persistence make sense in the over-all survival picture, so each man in his more complex role struggles both in darkness and in faith. Human consciousness being much broader than animal consciousness, man's role is correspondingly more complex than animal roles. Where the instincts of animals, derived from their genetic structure, are the final determinants of their success or failure to adapt and survive, man must depend upon observation, reason, and cultural pattern as well as upon biological instinct. His opportunities and adaptation problems are both broader and more difficult.

If, as it is supposed, there are beings in other planets which are at least different from and possibly more complex than any beings on this planet, including man, then their opportunities and adaptations will be correspondingly broad and complex. And they will contribute to the texture of the Whole in such a way as to increase its over-all complexity accordingly. To the denizens of some superior planet, our anthropomorphisms would appear inadequate in relation to the complexity of reality as they see it. Their "religion" would aim at imputing no less than the highest qualities of their own experience to their model of the Whole. All religious language seeks to be inclusive in this fashion.

The religious use of such a transcendence model is not for the sake of giving the believer a weapon with which to coerce his fellow believers, contrary believers, or non-believers. Quite the contrary, the aim of this model is to induce such a respect for the Whole and for oneself as part of the Whole that one's response to life is both vital and considerate, both reverential and rational, rather than careless, condescending, and destructively impulsive. Within such a framework science becomes a major cultural tool (in company with art and the humanities), a major tool with which to express the glory of

phenomena and to respect the orders by which phenomena—including man—may most fruitfully coexist.

The very emphasis on transcendence does away with the illusion that a person or a nation can be a law unto itself. Every man, by virtue of his emplacement in orders that are relatively fulfilling or destructive of his own and other energies, must study and understand, withdraw and refrain, cherish and sacrifice. In short, the love and respect of reality of which I am speaking is a more sure and comprehensive basis for the values of science, as we understand science, than any other I know.

Also, it is more in accord with common sense. Is it not more logical to trust the process out of which man comes, in spite of the vagaries, mischances, and misjudgments of individual men, than to trust man in general in spite of the alleged opacity, neutrality, or even hostility of the process? Since the part cannot be separated from the whole, the part cannot be loved or trusted separately. I am arguing that an exclusive humanism is essentially irrational but that a humanism in a theistic setting makes a good deal of sense. That is, the transcendence model that adequately supports any basic faith in the human venture must include more than the human venture per se.

A major problem in the credibility of this kind of transcendence model is the persistent mind-set in our day toward keeping a clear disjunction between the organic and inorganic. How can we move from a sense for an impersonal, machine-like system to a quasi-living history? The appeal I would make, beyond what has already been said about everyday human experience and its logic, is the experience of ecstasy. When one is grasped by an intense impression of value, whether concentrated in a sharply defined object or more generally diffused over the environment, one has the choice either of suppressing his response, thereby limiting the experience to his own insides, or of looking for means to celebrate communally and objectively the high voltage of value impact which he has undergone. The modern age tends to play it

cool, attributing all deep enthusiasm or agony to the perceiver rather than the perceived. The transcendence model I am espousing does the opposite. It does not limit love or hate, union or disjunction, to the subjective pole of experience. It expresses and understands these hot interactions as real interactions, and it counts as honorable the poet or priest who gives voice to his intensity by metaphor and anthropomorphic image.

Obviously, there is something childlike in this kind of symbolic response to life. Furthermore, children do not always distinguish between reality and neurosis; many of their intense reactions are largely internal and objectively unfounded. Therefore, the mature person who remains childlike must also be more than childlike. He develops critical intelligence and strives to distinguish between inner and outer realities. In the maturity of any culture the sciences develop for the same reason. Some persons in particular are gifted in their ability to survey with passionate love and with dispassionate judgment certain defined areas of phenomena. Their intellectual acumen is civilization's vital hedge against tragedy. However, no such hedge is foolproof. Also, without the enthusiasm, without the worship and love of one's own and other childlike selves and the environment that gathers them in, the human world loses its dynamic participation with the world at large and is on its way to isolation and despair. I think it is possible and necessary to be simultaneously childlike and mature.

One's transcendence model and its mythical media should allow both for the reality of tragedy and for the persistence of renewal from tragedy. In this respect I prefer the Christian dying and rising imagery, strange though it may sound to the modern ear. This imagery involves paradox. But the paradox seems to be a part of our experience, whether we like it or not. That is, from a purely empirical point of view, there is nothing we see that does not in time come to an end; and yet this universal decline apparently can come to no absolute end,

at least not in our imagination. Our transcendence model should include these tensioned polarities.

Our arguments in favor of enlarging the transcendence model of our thinking are not designed to conflict with scientific rationalism but rather to broaden the bases of its operation. We put no artificial boundary upon any kind of scientific procedure no matter how its conclusions may threaten to become reductionistic. Within the organic-inorganic matrix, many more specialized schemes of inquiry are possible than in a narrower inorganic model. The prospect of remythologization as I have outlined it is precisely designed to keep up with the more complex picture of reality which the sciences are developing. The world of science and religion as seen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is already overpassed. Let us hope that science and religion may achieve a mutually supporting development in the new world that is upon us.

#### NOTES

1. David Bidney, "Myth, Symbolism, and Truth," in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. T. A. Sebeck (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1958).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

3. See Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 76 and 300, for a discussion of this concept.

4. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* ("Bollingen Series," Vol. XLVI [New York: Pantheon Press, 1954]), chap. iv.

5. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947).

# Manifesto for a Dionysian Theology

*Sam Keen*

*I would believe only in a god who could dance.*

NIETZSCHE

At first glance, the choice of Sam Keen's article—from the Winter 1968–69 issue of *Cross Currents* \*—may seem to be a strange one, since in it as well as in his book *Apology for Wonder* he concerns himself with the immanental side of human experience. Never mind; though he is endeavoring to free himself and theology from what he believes to be false models of transcendence—models which limit or dissipate wonder—Keen does enlarge and expand the anthropological picture on which many of the recent appeals for response to transcendence rest. Persuaded that theology has been overbalanced on the side of the Apollonian (rational) element, Keen is primarily interested in recovery of the Dionysian (ecstatic) element—in recovery of a touch of “divine madness” that will bring dancing back to the sanctuary. Formerly on the faculty of the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Dr. Keen has recently been engaged in experimentation along the lines suggested in his “manifesto”; for example, he has directed a residency program at California's Esalen Institute—a program he describes as devoted to exploring the relation between theology and the applied behavioral sciences (encounter, meditation, etc.). He is also doing postdoctoral work at Western Behavioral Sciences Institute and at the Center for Studies of the Person. Not surprisingly, his latest full-length work is titled *To a Dancing God*.

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PHILOSOPHERS holding tenure, theologians committed to the preservation of orthodoxy, intellectuals captivated by ideas, citizens dedicated to establishing a perimeter of defense against insecurity, are reluctant to yield to the rhythm-induced ecstasy of the dance. It is understandable, therefore, that the strange music coming from the wilderness far removed from the academy and the marketplace has not been noted with acclaim in professional journals or popular press. But the music will go on, for Dionysus is again issuing an invitation to the dance, to ecstasy, enthusiasm and a touch of divine madness.

Middle-class wisdom looks to Apollo, demands sanity, and accurately maintains that it is dangerous to heed the intoxicating call of Dionysus. Culture depends upon discipline and order; civilization requires civility; even creativity involves sublimation and repression—all of which Dionysus tempts us to forget. In fact, both Dionysian and Apollonian elements are found in any culture, past or present; both chaos and order, ecstasy and discipline are woven into the fabric of all life. Most cultures provide for periodic return through game, festival, and orgy to the chaos that underlies the veneer of civilization (Saturnalia, Mardi Gras) while maintaining the legal order and the social discipline necessary for daily life. Yet chaos must be domesticated for human community to be possible; the city must build its walls of stone to defend itself against the barbarians without and its structures of law to protect itself from the chaotic passions of its own citizens; the ego must erect defenses against the insistent arational demands of the id. But if order must prevail over chaos, chaos must also have its rights or else vitality is killed by restraint, spontaneity falls prey to the necessity to do everything "decently and in order" (one of the higher laws of Presbyterians), and laughter fades before the spirit of seriousness. When Dionysus is not given his due, Apollo becomes a tyrant, a god to be killed.

Western culture has become increasingly Apollonian and the time has come when the rights of Dionysus must be reas-

serted. This tyranny of Apollo is especially evident in Western theology and religious institutions, which have for the most part identified with the *status quo* and been fearful of the chaos of psychological and political revolution. The religious establishment has put its weight behind maintaining the present boundaries, the present forms of personality and social organization. It has counseled that the impulses of the id must either find satisfaction within the existing structures of marriage and society or be repressed, and likewise that political revolution (from the left at any rate) must conform to the rules of capitalism and parliamentary procedure. If we could once pretend that an Apollonian theology was adequate we no longer can. Both the social revolutions in the underdeveloped countries and the encounter with depth psychology have given irrefutable evidence that the repression of the "lower" classes and the "lower" passions leads only to social and personal sickness. The only way toward health is in learning to live creatively with the chaos within. An integral society, like an integral personality, is the product of a democratic organization within which opposites may co-exist in mutual creative interaction. Pluralism is the condition of authentic life, and hence the quest for wholeness, for social and individual healing (salvation) must involve our learning again to praise Dionysus. For when Dionysus is denied the honor due him, the healing power of reformation, of ecstasy, wonder and grace is lost.

From the fringes of contemporary thought is coming a renewed vision of the Dionysian way of life. While it would be too much to claim that there is a self-conscious school of Dionysian thinkers, Thomas Altizer, Norman Brown, Nikos Kazantzakis, Herbert Marcuse and Alan Watts are all centrally concerned with themes which can fairly be called Dionysian, as in a lesser degree are Heidegger, Marcel, Tillich and Whitehead. The purpose of this article is to trace in broad outline the world-view and life-style of the Dionysian way with special reference to theology. We will first contrast the Apollonian and the Dionysian ways and, after suggesting a

corrective in the Dionysian understanding of the self, will advocate the necessity of recovering the Dionysian element in theology. Our concern is to discover what it might be like if we had the courage and/or folly to accept the invitation to dance our way through life.

### *The Apollonian Way*

Apollo is the god who most fully incarnates the ideals we associate with classical Greek thought. He is the god of the ego, of light, youth, purity, reasonableness, order, discipline and balance. Perhaps the most characteristic maxim of the Apollonian way is the one which Socrates adopted (from the oracle at Delphi) as the basis of a philosophy of life—"Know thyself!" Know thyself to be a man, to be limited in time and space; above all do not commit the folly of *hubris*, do not in pride presume to exceed the limits of mortality and aspire to the conditions of the gods.

Wisdom, in the Apollonian tradition, consists in learning the rules and boundaries and in distinguishing with clarity between that which belongs to mortality and that which is immortal, between the knowable and the unknowable, the possible and the impossible, man and God, I and thou, mine and yours. The happy man, having learned the proper limits of humanity, follows the way of moderation and seeks to govern the rebellious forces of the senses and the wayward imagination by the imposition of discipline. The psyche of man is a commonwealth which the wise man will subject to the rule of reason. One might well see in Plato's figure of the Demiurge one model for the Apollonian view of man. Like the architect of the universe, man also must be a craftsman, a fabricator (*homo faber*) who grasps the ideal of reason and by force of will imposes it upon the recalcitrant and chaotic givenness of life. Man shares with the gods the responsibility for creating a cosmos in which reason and order prevail. The rule of law is the path of wisdom. Man must distinguish be-



tween the good and the evil, the permissible and the impermissible; and then, as a citizen in a commonwealth under law, must take the responsibility for tailoring his inner and outer life to conform to what is required, to the laws governing nature, society, the psyche, and the relationship between God and man. Whatever impulses, desires, or actions run counter to the order necessary to a harmonious commonwealth must be repressed.

The Apollonian way has come to dominate Western culture. Science and technology rest upon distinguishing, clarifying, and gaining controlling knowledge over the environment. The world of science is the realm of law and regularity where personal desires and impulses are disciplined and brought into conformity to the objective and verifiable modes of thought of the scientific community. Western political and psychological organization also tends to stress private property, individual responsibility, and the unique identity of the individual. We have come to see man as an atom living in a society of atoms cut off both from the natural order below and the "super-natural" order above. The Apollonian organization of modern life is visible as one flies across the United States or any Western country. Where man is, order is obvious. The geometric patterns which we impose on our fields and cities reveal our passion for neat boundaries, for the discipline of ownership, for distinguishing between my possessions and yours. Our laws which stress individual responsibility and guilt show that we organize psychic space in the same way we structure physical space. Guilt before the law implies that one is in *full possession* of the personal faculties which make for responsibility.

The dominance of the Apollonian way has been especially evident in theology. Western theology has always been strongly theistic in its doctrine of God. God is *a* being, transcendent and separate from his creation; he must not be confused with the world or with any part of the world. Both Kierkegaard and Barth are typically Apollonian in their insistence that we must recognize "an absolute qualitative distinction between time

and eternity," between man and God. God must keep his boundaries sacrosanct, and the theologian as the explicator of his revelation must be jealous to destroy any theology which suggests that anything finite can mingle with God. Pantheism and mysticism are theologically suspect, as both Reinhold Niebuhr and Emil Brunner have argued, because they teach an unseemly confusion of God and the natural order, either as God becomes wholly incarnate in the world in pantheism, or as man finds a point of identity with God in his own soul in mysticism. The Apollonian God is a jealous God. Those who would trespass on his omnipotent and transcendent glory must be reminded that "good fences make good neighbors." God alone can overcome the distance between himself and everything finite, and because he is a God of love he has chosen to leave his isolation and reveal himself to man in special places and times. In certain "mighty acts," such as the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has chosen to be Emmanuel (God with us), to overcome the distance that otherwise separates the creatures from the Creator. The traditional theistic understanding of God's revelation in special acts, events and persons has created a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane and has led to the segregation of the experience of the holy from the realm of the everyday.

One other aspect of a dominantly Apollonian theology must be noted. Nietzsche, Sartre, Altizer, and others have charged that an Apollonian concept of a creator God is necessarily repressive of human dignity and freedom. The God of theism is a creator who fabricates the world out of nothing through the instrument of his reason (*logos*). Like a good craftsman, God gives the world order, structure, rationality and law. Man as a creature can find authentic life only by discovering God's plan for his life, only by actualizing the essence which he was potentially given in creation, only by obedience to the "will" of God. Thus the creator God becomes the omniscient judge who rewards and punishes those who obey and those who rebel against the standards which he has programmed into his created order. As the one who over-

sees the whole course of history, God is the critical audience before whom the drama of life is played. (Billy Graham: "Remember when you read those sexy magazines—God is watching you.") Such a God may be merciful and forgiving, the eye which watches may be kindly, but he is responsible for the "oughts," he is the definer of what human life should be. Man is authentic in obedience, not in self-creation. Increasingly, modern man has felt that he must rebel against such a God and assert his right to be for himself, to create his own oughts, to define for himself the nature of good and evil. This rebellion has been carried on with the help of Dionysus, to whom we now turn.

### *The Dionysian Way*

Dionysus was a strange and wild god, an import both to the Greek countryside and the Greek spirit. He seems to have originated in Thrace, where he was a god of fertility and the energy of nature. On Greek soil he became associated with wine as well as with the metamorphosis which is symbolized in the cycle of the seasons. The worship of Dionysus was literally enthusiastic; it involved ecstasy, license, revelry, and direct participation by eating in the life of the dying and re-born god. In the ecstasy induced by wine and dancing the worshipers lost their own personalities and were merged with Dionysus. Thus the boundaries separating man, nature, and the divine were erased.

The essence of the Dionysian way is that it dares the extreme and hence leads to a form of consciousness which is alien to the law-abiding and mean-regarding character of the Apollonian mind. The Dionysian way exalts ecstasy over order, the id over the ego, being possessed over a possessive orientation, the creative chaos of freedom over the security of inherited patterns of social and psychological organization, divine madness over repressed sanity. As Nietzsche pointed out in his study of the Apollonian and Dionysian types, it is Prometheus who is the model of the Dionysian way. Pro-

metheus transgressed the boundaries of *hubris* in stealing the fire from the gods and was, therefore, condemned to punishment. The hard lesson he teaches is:

Man's highest good must be bought with a crime and paid for by the flood of grief and suffering which the offended divinities visit upon the human race in its noble ambition.<sup>1</sup>

Both the Genesis myth and Freud's mythology teach the same lesson—man becomes man only by breaking the laws which would refuse him the personal knowledge of good and evil, only by "killing the father," the source of authority and power, who would keep him forever in a state of childhood and dependence. Only in abolishing the "law," in denying any authority that dictates what he must become, does man become free.

Wisdom in the Dionysian tradition consists of continuing openness to the diverse and sometimes contradictory streams that flow through the depths of man. Man is not a property whose boundaries must be guarded against the intrusion of chaos by the watchful eye of the ego and its symbolically masked agents, but it is a nexus (Whitehead), a field of awareness where all dimensions of reality converge. The boundaries are created by the possessive instinct, by the cultural ideologies which sacrifice vividness to security and ecstasy to order. In yielding to possession by the god, one is inhabited by a holy power that informs all life, and the boundaries are broken down between I and thou, man and nature, man and God, ego and id. The self exists by its mystical participation in the power of being, which is in all things. Once the boundaries of the ego are broken down, the self is understood not so much as a substance that has its own resident source of power but as one focus of a universal power, taking, for the moment, the form of an individual man. Nietzsche has spoken of the Dionysian way as one in which the principle of individuation is lost:

Not only does the bond between man and man come to be forged once more by the magic of the Dionysiac rite, but nature itself, long alienated or subjugated, rises again to

celebrate the reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. The earth offers its gifts voluntarily, and the savage beasts of the mountain and desert approach in peace. . . . Now the slave emerges as a freeman; all the rigid, hostile walls which either necessity or despotism has erected between men are shattered. Now that the gospel of universal harmony is sounded, each individual becomes not only reconciled to his fellow but actually at one with him—as though the veil of Maya had been torn apart and there remained only shreds floating before the vision of mystical Oneness. Man now expresses himself through song and dance as the member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk, how to speak, and is on the brink of taking wings as he dances.

Each of his gestures betokens enchantment; through him sounds a supernatural power, the same power which makes the animals speak and the earth render up milk and honey. He feels himself to be godlike and strides with the same elation and ecstasy as the gods he has seen in his dreams. No longer the *artist*, he has himself become a *work of art*; the productive power of the whole universe is now manifest in his transport, to the glorious satisfaction of the primordial One. . . .<sup>2</sup>

This loss of individuality, which is at the heart of the Dionysian way, has been expressed by modern thinkers in diverse terminology. Heidegger makes a complete analysis of the human condition without using the word "man." Man becomes *dasein*, "being there," an instance of Being, not a hermetic substance with an autonomous power of being. Norman Brown understands authentic life as requiring the death of the ego and a passivity by which *we are lived*, inhabited.

The *id* is instinct; that Dionysian "cauldron of seething excitement," a sea of energy out of which the ego emerges like an island. The term "*id*"—"it"—taken from Nietzsche (via Groddeck), is based on the intuition that the conduct through life of what we call our ego is essentially passive; it is not so much we who live as that we are lived, by unknown forces. The reality is instinct, and instinct is impersonal energy, an "it" who lives in us. I live, yet not I, but it lives in me; as in creation, *fiat*. Let it be; no "I" but an it. The "I-Thou" relationship is still a relation to Satan; the old Adversary; the

Accuser; to whom we are responsible; or old Nobodaddy in the garden, calling Adam, where art thou? Let there be no one to answer to.<sup>3</sup>

Alan Watts, drawing on the insights of Zen and eastern mysticism, makes substantially the same point as Brown. The authentic life, which Buddhism has spoken of as *nirvana*, involves losing the illusion of the ego as a separate agent.

Nirvana is a radical transformation of how it feels to be alive: it feels as if everything were myself, or as if everything—including “my” thoughts and actions—were happening of itself. There are still efforts, choices, and decisions, but not in the sense that “I *make* them”; they arise of themselves in relation to circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

If the more characteristic models for the Apollonian way are the activities of fabrication (God making the world in conformity with his *Logos*, man making himself in the image of some ideal) and legislation (God and man projecting laws which hold chaos in check and allow community), the model for the Dionysian way is the dance. Life is flux, movement, a dynamic power which assumes form for a moment and then changes. There is no end-point, no complete product. In the strict sense of the word there can be no integrity (a state of being complete, whole, unbroken) of individual life. Everything is a fraction, incomplete without its counterpart. In the dance of life, male and female, work and play, creativity and fallowness, day and night, life and death, belong together in a *rhythmic* unity. Identity is in movement, in the economy of fractions which create a community in diversity. Authentic thought is, as Nietzsche said, thought which dances. Kazantzakis' figure of Zorba the Greek might well be taken as a concrete illustration of the Dionysian way and of the centrality of dance as an organizing metaphor for life. Zorba dances when the joy or the tragedy of life overflows the capacity of his words.

Two other metaphors are also frequently used to characterize the Dionysian way—fire and war. Fire, like a dance, is al-

ways moving and consuming what it touches; life is not being but becoming, not substance but process, as Heraclitus said at the beginning of Western philosophy and as Hegel and Whitehead have reminded us more recently. Fire and dance are also war, because in the flux of experience the opposites belong together. Life is dialectic, hence thesis and antithesis are bound together in conflict. True warfare, like dance, like sex, like contest (*agon*), requires friendly enemies, requires the love of the enemy. Human communication at its best is, as Jaspers has said, "loving combat." We wrestle together in dialogue (which is polite warfare) in order that the whole truth may emerge from the incomplete and fractured individual perspectives.

The Dionysian way is one of iconoclasm or of what might be called "muraloclasm" (breaking down the walls). In destroying the traditional boundaries and limits that inform our accepted notions of personality and society, the Dionysian way flirts with madness. As psychoanalysis has demonstrated, there is at the depths of every person a wilderness, a chaos never domesticated by the "identity" we assume or the "personality" we put on "to meet the faces that we meet." The Dionysian wisdom is that we must immerse ourselves in this wilderness, which we usually repress and know only in dreams, daydreams (both brief psychotic episodes), and in the cultivated symbols of art and religion. The source of the power for vivid life lies locked in the unconscious. To be vital we must risk madness, as Zorba the Greek points out in his criticism of the life-style of his Apollonian "boss."

"No, you're not free," he said. "The string you're tied to is perhaps longer than other people's. That's all. You're on a longer piece of string, boss; you come and go, and think you're free, but you never cut the string in two. It's difficult, boss, very difficult. You need a touch of folly to do that; folly, d'you see? You have to risk everything! But you've got such a strong head, it'll get the better of you. A man's head is like a grocer; it keeps accounts: I've paid so much and earned so much and that means a profit of this much or a loss of that

much! The head's a careful little shopkeeper; it never risks all it has, always keeps something in reserve. It never breaks the string. Ah no! It hangs on tight to it, the bastard! If the string slips out of its grasp, the head, poor devil, is lost, finished! But if a man doesn't break the string, tell me what flavor is left in life? The flavor of camomile, weak camomile tea. Nothing like rum—that makes you see life inside out! <sup>5</sup>

Norman Brown gives the same speech as Zorba, changing only the rhetoric:

Dionysus, the mad god, breaks down the boundaries; releases the prisoners; abolishes repression; and abolishes the *principium individuationis*, substituting for it the unity of man and the unity of man with nature. In this age of schizophrenia, with the atom, the individual self, the boundaries disintegrating, there is, for those who would save our souls, the ego-psychologists, "The Problem of Identity." But the breakdown is to be made into a breakthrough; as Conrad said, in the destructive element immerse. The soul that we call our own is not a real one. The solution to the problem of identity is, get lost. Or as it says in the New Testament: "He that findeth his own psyche shall lose it, and he that loseth his psyche for my sake shall find it." <sup>6</sup>

We are here at the heart of the Dionysian view of man. And a problematic heart it is! If the boundaries established by the ego are to be broken down in order that direct participation in the divine power which pervades all may be experienced, what of the self who remains the focus of experience? The Dionysian way has never been able to offer an adequate doctrine of the person. Norman Brown and Alan Watts both make frequent use of the Buddhist idea of no-self. Once the self strips off those items of its identity which are accumulated from the repressive demands of parents and culture, from the defense mechanisms which insist upon uniqueness and separateness, there is no ego left, no unique identity which distinguishes one man from another.

Our illusions of uniqueness and separateness arise out of our internalization of masks (personalities) and models. Our ego is



a theater, and it is the masks we wear and the roles we feel compelled to play that separate us. Once the masks drop and the performance before the audience of the introjected parental figures, and others from whom approval is necessary, ceases, there is no more ego, no more internal theater, no defense mechanisms. There remains only a perceiving mind that now realizes its oneness with all things.

By way of criticism we must insist that while it is evident from the therapeutic success of the psychoanalytic method that psychic health demands openness to the unconscious, to the repressed awareness of the totality of experience, it is equally evident that some principle of identity or selfhood is necessary for authentic and vivid life. When Norman Brown advocates schizophrenia as the divine madness appropriate to the Dionysian way of life, he ignores a crucial distinction between garden-variety insanity and that divine madness which is the essence of creativity and joy. There is a vast difference between a schizophrenic who has no ego strong enough to screen the chaotic intrusions from the unconscious, and hence is submerged in a state of chaos in which there is neither clarity nor joy, and the person who has learned to be open to the depths of emotion and feeling and to the whole range of symbolism which lies beneath the surface of daily preoccupations. The schizophrenic has no person; he is lacking in the unity and the sense of limits which are necessary to even minimal functioning in a social context. The healed schizophrenic, if we may use that term for the Dionysian type of personality organization, is aware of the glory and horror of being human. He knows that the difference between himself and the murderer is only that he dreams what the murderer does, as well as what the saint does. He is aware of the diverse possibilities which exist within himself, of the underworld of hatred and the overworld of dreams and ideals, of the hope and the despair, of the child that remains within. Yet the healed schizophrenic is also in touch with some principle of unity within himself. Call this principle of unity the self, the person, or whatever, but unity there must be if we are to distinguish be-

tween that insanity in which there is no transcendence but only tragedy and that divine madness in which the individual knows himself to be a part of that unifying power which binds together the kaleidoscope of reality.

My suggestion is that we call the Dionysian form of consciousness in which there is tolerance of the plurality within the self *inclusive self-consciousness*, as distinguished from the Apollonian *exclusive ego-consciousness* in which the ego is felt as a sensitive enclosure whose boundaries must be protected from all that is alien or strange. Inclusive self-consciousness is, in Marcel's terms, available (*disponible*); it keeps open house for strange visitors from far and near without being threatened by the new, the unexpected, or the disorienting. The authentic Dionysian consciousness prefers astonishment to possession; wonder is its rule of life, its charter of organization.

The principle of organization that gives unity to the inclusive self-consciousness of the Dionysian person is the rhythmic oscillation between the formation of models or self-images and iconoclasm. The authentic self continually sets boundaries and limits by its introjection of ideals and images of what it is and what it would like to be and then it destroys these boundaries as experience overflows them. Psychological and spiritual health does not consist in having no self but in keeping the process of self-formation flowing, of continually enlarging the images by which we understand ourselves and our world. In this way the Dionysian self is always in process of becoming more open, more wondering, more permissive of that strangeness and novelty which renews the sense of limitless possibilities and increases the capacity to hope. Dionysian man is *homo viator* (Marcel), a pilgrim, a gypsy, a dancer. His security lies in learning to be at home on the road. By contrast Apollonian man is a homesteader who stakes out a territory with defined limits and possibilities and finds his security in the defense of this territory. He lives by what Robert Ardrey called "the territorial imperative."

## *Dionysian Theology*

Just as the Apollonian way had an appropriate theological expression in traditional western theism, the Dionysian way also has its characteristic understanding of God, revelation, and the style of the religious life.

The symbol of dance best captures the unique emphasis of a Dionysian theology's idea of God. Nietzsche's statement may serve as a starting point.

I would believe only in a god who could dance. And when I saw my devil I found him serious, thorough, profound, and solemn: it was the spirit of gravity—through him all things fall.

Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity!

I have learned to walk: ever since, I let myself run.

I have learned to fly: ever since, I do not want to be pushed before moving along.

Now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god dances through me.<sup>7</sup>

In order to understand the significance of the symbol of a dancing God we must go back briefly to the Apollonian theological tradition. Western theology, until modern times, has never been free of the Aristotelian concept of God as the Unmoved Mover. God has been a giver, never a receiver, a frigid God to whom no value accrued from the world. Even where Christian theology has spoken of God's death upon the cross, it has never allowed suffering, change, or time, to be taken into the life of God himself. When the Apollonian tradition has allowed movement within God it was not because he was understood as being intimately related to the chaotic and tragic flux of time, but because he was trinitarian and thus, being a plenum of perfection and reality, had internal relations between the "persons" of the Godhead. God's self-sufficient perfection has precluded his passionate involvement

in the movement and suffering that is human history. Many theological dodges have been thought up to allow God both the static perfection of his eternal being and the semblance of a relation to time, but always the Apollonian tradition has come out on the side of the perfection, aseity and impassability of God. As the Methodist discipline reminds us: God is without "body, parts, or passions." That which is perfect cannot change, that which suffers cannot be God; hence God is ultimately beyond change and suffering; he is an unmoved mover; he does not dance; he is substance not process.

Modern theology has increasingly rejected the notion of an unmoved mover, of a God in whom there is "no shadow of change," and has come to speak of a dancing God, a God whose perfection is in process, whose life is involved in the realities of relationship. A static God is dead. Under the impact of scientific categories which show that all "substance" is process, that mass is energy, that being is relationship, theology has rejected the Apollonian God of defined boundaries and self-sufficient life; the God whose sole activity was knowing himself, whose mode of creation was through the instrumentality of *logos*, whose "ideas" formed the essence of all things. The thinkers associated with this change are many. Other than those we have mentioned as seeking to create a Dionysian theology, process theologians such as Whitehead and Hartshorne have made the most substantial contribution.

A God who is changed and relativized by a real relationship with the moving face of human history is no longer the theistic God of Apollonian theology. A Dionysian theology tends in the direction of pantheism or panentheism. God is not a being but Being itself, or the ground of being. Whether God transcends the world is a moot question (this being the issue between pantheism and panentheism), but the immanence of God is stressed. God is not a strange being enthroned beyond time and space in unchangeable glory who occasionally condescends to invade our planet by means of a mighty act or an incarnation. God is the creative power at the heart of all things. As the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus reports Jesus as saying:

Wherever there are two, they are not without God; and where there is one alone I say I am with him. Lift up the stone and there shalt thou find me; cleave the wood, and I am there.

One of the reasons a Dionysian theology finds it necessary to reject the traditional Apollonian concept of a monarchical God isolated in eternity and revealed primarily in an inaccessible past (and these ideas logically involve each other, for it is only a distant God who must occasionally make himself known in an otherwise secular world by way of mighty acts) is that such a theology is inevitably both *repressive* and *regressive*. Before the face of the God who is the Absolute Monarch of the Universe man always stands under scrutiny and judgment. Nietzsche, Sartre, Brown and Altizer have all stressed the repressive nature of the traditional concept of God. Before the omniscient eye we are reduced to objects who may only obey or rebel; we become artifacts of a Cosmic Artisan devoid of any real freedom to give meaning to our own lives. Life becomes a performance before an all-seeing spectator. As Norman Brown notes, such a transcendent judge is really the projection of the image of the father, the superego ideal made absolute. As long as such an idea of God is held:

the distinction between public and private disappears; we are on stage at all times. Christianity will not be rid of the performance principle, will not become a pure principle of invisible grace, until it gets rid of the specter of the Father, Old Nobodaddy, the watching institution.<sup>8</sup>

The God who is really for man must genuinely be *with* him, he must leave the boundaries of his own isolation (always a sign of defensive weakness) and incarnate himself in the movement of human history. Altizer, using language that is still Christocentric, finds the unique meaning of Christian theology in its radical incarnational principle. He can go so far as to insist that the old God is dead and therefore the transcendent ground of repression and guilt is broken. Christianity is the good news that the distant and transcendent God

who showed himself only in the sacred preserve of some past time is dead.

The Christian Word appears in neither a primordial nor an eternal form; for it is an incarnate Word, a Word that is real only to the extent that it becomes one with human flesh. If we are to preserve the uniqueness of the Christian Word, we cannot understand the Incarnation as a final and once-and-for-all event of the past. On the contrary, the Incarnation must be conceived as an active and forward-moving process, a process that even now is making all things new . . . .<sup>9</sup>

A Dionysian theology says that a man must lose his life if he is to gain it, that the defensiveness of the ego must give way to inclusive self-consciousness, which acknowledges the communion of the self with the whole world, that the rigid boundaries of our "unique" personalities are the product of a possessive and repressive orientation to life. Such a theology cannot worship a God who is understood on the model of that isolated life which in man arises out of weakness and fear. God is God in giving himself, in losing his boundaries, in entering into the dance of history.

If God loses himself in the dance of history the radical question of the appropriateness of retaining "God" language arises. If the boundaries separating God, nature and man are abolished does it make any sense to continue speaking of God? The Dionysian "God" is not a transcendent object or person to be known by the inbreaking or revelation at certain unique points, but rather the power of "the creative good" (Wieman) or the "power of being" in all things (Tillich). The justification for continuing to speak about God is pragmatic and epistemological. Man must have symbols which grasp and articulate his intuition of what he experiences as ultimate. The symbols are always objectifying but the reality they point to overflows all conceptual boundaries. "God" language functions to focus celebration and adoration on those sacred dimensions of reality which are known in the ecstatic experiences of love, creativity, hope, joy and thanksgiving. What is ultimately the case about the whole of reality is beyond

human powers of perception. At best man can only yield to those experiences in which he senses the presence of a power which urges human life toward a richer harmony. If he names this power "God" it is because he confesses that the power by which life is sustained and invited toward wholeness is no human creation and abides and remains steadfast even in a world where death does have dominion over every individual. To speak of God is to safeguard man against the pathetic arrogance which presumes to possess this power rather than be possessed by it.

In a Dionysian theology, revelation, which is merely man's awareness of the presence of the holy, is not limited either to special events in some past history of salvation, nor to any special realm of the sacred. Reality as a whole is sacramental. Any tree, person, or event may become transparent to the holy power that informs every living thing. Revelation is always new; it is a process not a product. The world is the vocabulary of God. In opening ourselves to life as a gift to be enjoyed and utilized with responsibility, we may find that which makes us whole, which undergirds our lives with the certainty of dignity and value, at any point in our experience. A Dionysian view or revelation moves in what Tillich called a radically "theonomous" direction. The ordinary is seen as holy. There are no special times and places, no privileged sections of history. Revelation is homogenized into the quotidian; it is found in the ordinary rather than the extra-ordinary. Van Gogh's paintings reveal clearly the Dionysian vision of the reality of the everyday permeated with the presence of the holy. In a letter he stated:

I can very well do without God, both in my life and my painting, but I cannot, ill as I am, do without something which is greater than I, which is my life—the power to create. . . . And in a picture I want to say something comforting as music is comforting. I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to give by the actual radiance and vibration of our colorings.<sup>10</sup>

In the same spirit Norman Brown writes:

Dionysus calls us outdoors . . . Out of the temple made with hands; out of the ark of the book; out of the cave of the law; out of the belly of the letter. The first tabernacle in Jerusalem; the second tabernacle the universal Church; the third tabernacle the open sky.<sup>11</sup>

The Dionysian way understands theological language as arising out of those experiences which are dense with meaning and value. In love, trust, wonder, hope, and other such experiences having what Marcel called "ontological weight," we find life a holy gift and identify its source as "God." Theological language is a way of giving form to those wondering moments when we find ourselves possessed by a power which makes life whole and holy. The language is merely a handle we use to understand and to maintain ourselves in a condition of openness to this power. As such it must always be a means, an instrument which is abandoned when it ceases to function creatively. A living theology demands a constant process of iconoclasm and renaming of the holy. There are no holy words, not even the word God.

A valid theology constantly orders and extrapolates the implications of the experience of that power of being which gives meaning and value to life. The traditional symbols of theology are not a correct system of language to be memorized but a museum of models or linguistic maps of the way in which the religious intuition has been articulated in the past. Loyalty to the tradition does not mean that we accept the adequacy of past models and maps; only that we learn from them the principles of theological map-making. Theological language is a way of handling experiences, of clarifying and orienting ourselves. It is a creation of man and hence it is a human responsibility to make the language function in a way which maximizes the creative potentials of the human community. To admit that theological language is a projection, a creation of man, is not to deny that it makes cognitive claims concerning God nor is it to reduce theology to an illusion. It



is merely to admit that the sources of all that is, the holy power which we apprehend as the foundation of human dignity and meaning, can only be conceived in human terms, in stories, myths, symbols. The God from whom human life is a gift can never be adequately named, hence we are responsible at a minimum to be flexible in our adherence to symbols for the ultimate, lest our allegiance turn into idolatry and we give our loyalty to symbols which have become repressive.

Theologically as well as psychologically man must remain a pilgrim, a wayfarer; epistemologically and linguistically he is *homo viator*. Recognizing the relativity of all his modes of perceiving and articulating, the religious man must strike his theological tents and move on when the waters of life dry up where there has traditionally been an oasis. Man must give names to the ultimate if he is to possess and understand his experience, but he must be willing to undergo the painful process of iconoclasm and reformation. Perhaps the real sin against the holy spirit is the refusal to move to new linguistic and institutional forms which keep things verdant when the old names and organizations have become parched and devoid of life. A living theology is a dance, the rhythmic oscillation between the experiences of the nameless power that gives life and invites us to wholeness, and the domestication of that power through language and institutions. The same principle which governs the organization of inclusive self-consciousness governs an authentic Dionysian theology—there must be continual re-formation of the images and models by which we understand and give shape to our lives.

Apollonian theology, with its assumption that the decisive revelation of God took place in the past, has always been oriented around the *hearing* of the word in which the memory and witness of God's mighty acts is preserved. Tradition, which is the codified memory of the sacred time of the distant God's inbreaking in history, is the instrument of revelation; the ear is the organ of religious perception. By contrast, a Dionysian theology assumes that the decisive revelation of God's presence in history takes place in the present. God is

perceived as source of the gift of life and the power which invites us toward wholeness in every present moment of experience. Tradition is illustration; the memory of God's acts that is preserved in the literature and discourse of the theological community (the church or synagogue) is important to the present-day believer only to the extent that it helps him interpret *his own personal and social history* as revelatory, as undergirded by that which assures dignity and meaning to human existence. This means that Dionysian theology is oriented toward the *eye*, the senses and the body. It seeks the fullest possible participation in the present moment; it urges that we taste and see and feel the world, that we penetrate to the abiding dimensions of meaning and value that are within the immediate moment of experience.

In assuming that the present moment is the time of revelation we become involved in a theology of affection and emotion. Our basic feelings of wonder or possession, trust or mistrust, expectation or boredom, hope or despair, nostalgia or satiety, love or fear, potency or impotency are far more fundamental to the way we actually position ourselves in and experience our world than the linguistic systems and ideas that we articulate. A God whose revelation *was* in the flesh but for the contemporary believer primarily *is* in the Word will be absent from the substance of human life and present only in its rationalizations and ideologies. To the degree that our primarily religious perception is a matter of memory, God is dead. If we are unable to identify any power which we may call God in our present feelings and experience then we had best let God language be "antiqued" and preserved for its decorative value. The God of past mighty acts cannot fill our need for a sanctifying power which makes us whole in the present moment. To isolate God either in transcendence or in past history is to destroy him. Since that is what most western theology has done it is little wonder that the secret has been let out . . . "God is Dead." Either we learn how to use our theological language to identify the action of God in the dynamics of present experience or we capitulate. The domi-

nant emphasis of contemporary theology on the revelation of the transcendent God in special mighty acts in history is built upon an empty slogan. There is no such thing as history divorced from nature or experience. All theology has risen from man's effort to interpret the world given to him in experience. "God" and "act of God" are interpretations of experience. The real question separating Apollonian and Dionysian theologies is "In whose experience is the holy normatively revealed for our time? In our forefathers' or our own?" A Dionysian theology proclaims that we must return to basic experiences and attitudes, such as trust, love, wonder, joy, sorrow, hope and despair, in order that we may learn again how to speak with integrity about what is holy and sacred. It may well be that in recovering a wondering openness to our total experience we may discover that ours is a holy place, that the events of our own personal histories tell a story of promise and fulfillment and give testimony to the presence of a power within human history which makes for wholeness and freedom.

To accept the Dionysian invitation to the dance is not without danger. Revolution is a radical solution. It only remains to consider whether in this time of psychological and political crisis anything less than a radical solution is adequate. Should we by foolishness or courage discover that we may celebrate the holiness of life in any time and place, we might be induced to question that other form of madness which has brought us to the edge of moral and political nihilism—the unquestioned Apollonian assumption that impulse must be repressed and revolution be dealt with by violence, even at the cost of napalmed innocence. If out of timidity or the desire for security we refuse the ecstasy of allowing our ideas, our bodies and our institutions to dance, perhaps there remains only that form of insanity which expends its substance in defending some absolute qualitative distinction between U.S. defense of freedom and communist aggression or in insisting on some 17th parallel dividing time from eternity.

## Summary

Without denying that an adequate philosophy or theology will partake of both Apollonian and Dionysian elements, we have maintained that our time is predominantly in need of recovering the Dionysian element. The respective emphases of these two ways may be summarized:

### The Apollonian Way

Man-the-maker, fabricator, molder and manipulator of environment.

Domination of the ego, emphasis upon erecting boundaries, giving form, intellectual and material possession. The will and the intellect are central.

Value is created by action. Authentic life is aggressive, "masculine," active.

As translated into theological idiom the two ways yield emphases upon:

Theism or deism. God is a being encountered as a Thou, revealing himself in unique acts in history.

A theology of the Word, work, action, speaking, willing, thinking, consciousness, order.

### The Dionysian Way

Man-the-dancer responding to the givenness of life in its multiplicity.

Domination of the id. Emphasis upon destroying boundaries, exploration of diversity, chaos, vitality. Feeling and sensation are central.

Value is discovered, it is given as we encounter the world in wonder. Authentic life involves passivity, accepting, responding.

Pantheism or Panentheism. God is being itself, the encompassing, the power of being in all, known in the density of experiences in which value is discovered.

A theology of the spirit, leisure, play, listening, waiting, feeling, chaos, the unconscious.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 64.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
3. Norman Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 88.
4. Alan Watts, *Psychotherapy East and West* (New York: Mentor Books, 1966), p. 60.
5. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), p. 300.
6. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
7. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), p. 153.
8. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
9. Thomas Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 40.
10. Quoted in Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (London: Faber & Faber), p. 206.
11. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

### *III. Pioneers in the Recovery*

# Karl Rahner: Theology of the Spiritual Life

*John Carmody, S.J.*

Though the eminent Catholic thinker Karl Rahner has himself said that ours is a time not for a *Summa Theologica* but for exploratory and tentative probes, his own work perhaps comes closer to providing a *Summa*-like synthesis than that of any other living theologian. In his essay outlining Rahner's thought, John Carmody, S.J., stresses that it is marked not only by balance and comprehensiveness but also by unstinting attention to lived Christian faith. "Karl Rahner offers contemporary Christians a vast corpus of theological investigations which keep mystery and experience in constant interaction." Father Carmody has taught at Boston and Woodstock colleges and at Georgetown University, and is now engaged in doctoral studies in religion at Stanford University. The transcendental philosophy and theology of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan have for some time been Father Carmody's main interests; it is his hope to broaden their kind of theological anthropology so as to include non-Christian religious experience. In addition to *Chicago Studies*\*—from whose Spring 1969 number his article is taken—he has written for such journals as *Religion in Life*, *The Bible Today*, and *The American Benedictine Review*.

KARL RAHNER is a theologian in whom it is easy to see that theo-logy is man's impassioned living-with God's word. Throughout Rahner's prolific writing there is a constant concern for the concrete, saving meaning in the topic at hand. This theology is unabashedly "existential"—riveted to the

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being-roots of man, where grace and freedom decide Christ's reception. The publication of the third volume of Rahner's *Theological Investigations (Theology of the Spiritual Life)* underscores this preoccupation with the personal implications of revelation. The essays collected there are formally "ascetical," but the biblical, dogmatic, and moral themes of Rahner's other scientific articles play in them. Because Rahner does express much of his thought in the cast of ascetical or spiritual theology, and because the Christian in search of profound religious doctrine has no excess of sources, it may be useful to offer Rahner's main insights as they apply to the personal spiritual life. I shall try to indicate the major theses of Rahner's over-all "synthesis," analyze the sub-themes of his spiritual theology, and then show the particular utility of his theology today.

### *General Theses*

Man finds himself in an existence he cannot fathom: this might well be a succinct expression of Rahner's theological *point de départ*. On all sides, human life stretches out into the unknown, and what one makes of the unmasterable context, indeed stuff, of his life is the crucial option deploying his inmost freedom. For Rahner, the mystery man meets as the contextual, encompassing field of his consciousness is God's unbounded all. It is a blanketing presence, a silent immensity we cannot bring under our control. Rather, we are controlled by it: the mystery of Being is the foundation and constant presupposition of our human activity. No categorical, delimited object of knowledge would be perceived but for the mysterious back-drop of Being; no particular good would ever be loved but for the referential whole, the absolute Good which draws our freedom. So man's intelligence and love expose the transcendence which calls him forward. His spirituality is an opening out from space and time—a window onto the absolute which discloses a destiny inextricably tied to mystery. Even if



a man should deny this destiny, claiming that his life is purely finite and merely the factitious product of casual evolution, his expression would presuppose the horizon Rahner names the existential mystery.

But the very constitutiveness of this holding mystery makes it ambiguous. Because man cannot operate without the ground of his humanness, it is liable to be overlooked. Being has suffered various fates in the history of thought. Sometimes it is apprehended numinously, and thus deified as the holy mystery; other times it is called a void making life absurd. More frequently, man meets his grounding mystery only implicitly, and his stance toward it is ambiguous. He sees his own life as a question; he does not really know what death's finale will show it to have been. Sometimes it seems that the solid goodness of creatures has to imply a fontal creator, for so much being and value could not be spawned by a void. Other times the cracks in existence yawn cavernously, so that the puzzle is rather how anything manages to be at all: nothing, rather than something, seems more likely. Less radically, the taffy-pull of good and evil in human history twists man into a rancid question mark. This is the moral puzzle in the mystery of human existence. Even if the existential ground is positive and good, does not our depravity condemn us as perverse products no Goodness could abide? An absolute who is holy must judge our sin; we are then tempted to call his silence a stay of execution and our darkness a grace not to be troubled.

Summarily, therefore, human experience reveals man as a question. He is the being of history who clearly knows intimations of all and nothing, condemnation and salvation. At the core of his self, he must wait and listen. Here, where the anchor-chain of his being slips from his sight, he cannot run from inscrutable mystery. It is present to his most frenetic distraction; it is necessary for his most pedestrian mongering. Man is the being held by Being. He is the one defined and categorized only by virtue of the undefinable.

In this way, Rahner comes to the traditional theology of man as an obediential potency. Through his own existential

phenomenology, he reaches what he takes to be the core of every "spirit-in-the-word." From theology's viewpoint, this makes man a "hearer of the word," the being who must listen to the mystery of Being, in hope that it may speak. Should the absolute, "horizontal" all disclose itself, its declaration would be a self-manifesting "word." Spirit-in-the-word only meets intelligibility when it is historical—when it takes a form proportioned to our fleshly containment. Thus, the disclosure of mystery, should it occur, will be a perceivable coming into our ambience. Event, action, word, speech—these are all variants on the *symbolic* presence the mystery must assume if it is to become clarified, disclosed mystery-for-us.

### *The Mystery of Existence*

The foundations of Rahnerian thought are therefore a theological anthropology. Rahner keeps central focus on the experiential mystery at the heart of human existence. It is to this point that he shines the gospel light of free revelation. Consequently, his theology seldom ossifies into tidy propositions. It concerns the living God, always greater than our best concepts, whom we meet in our midst. This God speaks for our salvation—our deliverance from absurdity and sin. And the theology which confesses this God, in grateful praise of his goodness-drawn-near, sets both tradition and intelligence in the service of the word's salvific intent. It is what one might call a pastoral theology—a theology ever solicitous for the pain and possibility of man's inmost heart, where the Spirit judges the world and broods filial love. Such theology, as Rahner brilliantly performs it, has a human weight, an experiential strength which average dogmatics lacks. Surprisingly, it is the transcendental preoccupations which make it more satisfying. That is, Rahner's pastorally oriented expositions ring more true, more pertinent to salvation, because they keep present the mystery holding human life. Too much dogmatics confines itself to the categorical, predicamental domain—the area

of conceptual clarification, where the mystery is splintered for our manipulative control. No doubt this categorical work is important, unavoidable, and sanctioned by a revelation that has assumed the space-time halts of a definite history. No doubt we need clear responses to the questions about particular articles of faith which (as the history of dogma shows) men are bound to raise. But saving revelation immediately addresses the fullness of our concrete existence, and experienced human existence makes mystery more primordially decisive than even the sum of its categorical declarations.

So much for a persuaded exposition of Rahner's concern with foundational mystery. It will need no further defense for those who grant revelation a "pragmatic" (saving) priority-of-intent, and who agree that salvation is a matter of the inmost *heart*—the unity of man, below his channeling into mind and will, where the simple enfleshed spirit answers or refuses its one decisive call.

It is Rahner's usual method to move from the foundational experience of mystery to its definitive declaration in Christ. This move is really a swing or pivoting, for his attention to the inspired forms of God's speaking (primarily Scripture) never takes him far from existential experience. This is really the point to his theology of revelation: the historical, categorical revelation which culminates in Christ is just the clarification of a self-communication God has chosen to work transcendently throughout all human experience. It is a most gracious and useful clarification, for without it man turns his ambiguous experience into idols and perhaps despair, but it bears on an "intrinsic" sending by which the mysterious God is already present to every human consciousness, in an unspoken approach which both offers and solicits love. Thus, the word-revelation of our Judaeo-Christian history declares a universal state of affairs. Rahner leans heavily on the dogma that God wills the salvation of all men (*cf.* I Tim. 2), coupling it with the universal mediation of Christ to make the "supernatural existential" issue in the corollary of anonymous Christianity. This theological *a priori* then moulds certain

pastoral attitudes: one never preaches but to men who have some experience of grace; through all its tossings, faith can yet float calmly in the trust that the *Deus semper major* lovingly pursues even those who reject him; the most important task is to locate the experience of grace and illumine it with the gospel; the Incarnation gives the basic pattern or *leit-motif* to Christian life (including thought), because it is the permanent, definitive, irrevocable *Urwort* hypostatically joining the absolute God who gives himself transcendently to the categorical flesh of a "sacramental," historical revelation.

### *The Mysteries of Faith*

The simple, absolute mystery of God's self-giving is revealed by Christ to have an inner structure. That is, historical revelation can speak more definitely about God in himself and for us, because it expresses the ungraspable fullness of God's mystery in accurate, if always inadequate, categories. Rahner finds the basic structure of Christian revelation in the three mysteries of the Trinity, grace, and Incarnation. They are synthetic, integrated mysteries of God's active desire to give himself for our salvation. Because God gives *himself* to men, the immanent Trinity which God is in himself has come into our midst. That is, the threefoldness of God-for-us—the economic Trinity who work our salvation—may be predicated of God as he is in himself, apart from his unnecessary relation to our world, because "as who I am I shall be with you." Christian revelation discloses God-for-us as Father, Word-Son, and Spirit. The underived source of being, life, and salvation is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He is the reference of the New Testament *Theos*. The New Testament declares that the Creator-Lord is the Sender of Jesus, the origin of his mission to inaugurate the Kingdom and the power which raised him to Lordship.

Jesus is the revealing word of the Father, the enfleshed self-gift of God. Rahner makes much of the fact that it is the

*Word* who takes on flesh. Precisely the second person of the Trinity, spoken out into a finite other, bears God into our midst and accepts his will for men. Thus, the generation of the Word and the Incarnation are inevitably joined in our theological probing. One can hypothesize that the Incarnation gives creation its basic architecture—that God makes a world through his Word and with Jesus in mind. Further, a theological *a priori* makes *man* precisely that which occurs when God speaks himself out into a finite other. This is the top-side way of coming to the “hearer of the word” or “capacity for God” definition of man which Rahner’s anthropology attains from experience. So the Incarnation should be viewed as the perfect achievement of God’s will to give himself to man. What God works in Jesus of Nazareth consummately, he works in all the just more incipiently. This may be expressed by saying that divinization equals sonship—that we share the Trinitarian relations “in Christ” (receiving the Father’s speaking, bearing the referential stance of his Word, breathing a Spirit of love towards other men).

The Holy Spirit appears in Scripture as God given and accepted—as the fruits of salvation now immanently present to us. He is the Spirit of love, who gives life to the Church, so that God’s people are always holy with his self-giving *agape*. The Spirit also presides over our prayer, ruling the ineffable desire at the depths of our souls and making us holy sons. It is important for the correlation of grace and Trinity that Christians appreciate the relations they have to each of the divine Persons. Without taking these to be persons in the modern sense, and so unknowingly practicing tritheism, we should yet make real the perfect plurality God declares himself to be. For grace is essentially God’s own presence in us—the gift of himself—and therefore it is Trinitarian. What our faith clings to in the dark surround of mystery is God’s own perfect fullness of knowing and loving.

The other cardinal features of Christianity Rahner relates to these three most fundamental mysteries. For instance, he sees the Church as the consequence of the Incarnation: it is the

continuing historical locus of God's eschatologically victorious grace. In this people joined to Christ by faith and love, God keeps present in the world the declared, categorical form of his transcendental and efficacious revelation. The sacraments and Scripture are principal channels by which this gathered people declares the essential grace and purpose which form it. The sacraments actuate the Incarnational communication of grace for important times of human life, while Scripture is read in the Church as the canonical form of the normative apostolic Church's self-understanding.

This quick sketch of Rahner's move from the experiential mystery of human life to the main outline of Christian belief is an attempt to render the fruits of the concern for simplicity and integration that dominates his theology. Again and again Rahner insists that our time demands a profound, global faith and a short formula of belief which will exhibit the radical essence of Christianity as a gracious answer of God to the question we men are. God's mystery is never abolished by theology, and the living declaration of his self-sending Word always begins and ends with a confession that he is incomparably more than our minds and hearts. But in Jesus Christ we have the concrete symbol on which our faith can focus, to assure it the balanced hope needed for divine sonship in the world. Theology should count it its greatest privilege to serve God's normative, sanctifying word of love, offering all its resources for the task of declaring that word winningly to its generation.

### *Spiritual Theology*

One can see, therefore, that Rahner will make no rigid compartments separating theoretical theology from lived Christian faith. He brings his dogmatic arsenal to bear on the combat of the individual spiritual life, and even here his preference is for the big guns. For example, the theology of faith, grace, and the Incarnation figure prominently in Rahner's spiritual

writings. In this preoccupation, however, they are exposed with pointed reference to personal experience. Faith is a frequent theme of Rahner's more recent writings. He is constantly at pains to indicate the deep locus of Christian faith, in the depths of our confrontation with death and life's ground. Knowing that God is bound to be master and unmasterable, the Christian can venture a surrender to his existence, in trust that life will bring him an indefinable strength to survive which he can believe to be Christ's helping Spirit.

This relates to the experience of grace, and to a theology of discernment. When Rahner wishes to indicate God's coming in free self-giving, for the saving support of our lives, his predilection is for the less dubitable experiences. That is, he points to the occasions of "pure" consolation or unrewarded sacrifice, where it is more clear that the term of our gamble, the intent of our action, is no this-worldly thing. To stay in the dark silence of our horizon, spend ourselves in service no one will ever praise, choose a course our whole sensibility repulses (because it is simply, unconsolingly demanded)—these are the religious acts which confound the world and point to God's free presence in our midst. They explain somewhat the strange actions of the saints, who were always trying to love God more for himself than the happy this-worldly effects of his grace.

Grace is therefore Incarnational (the juncture of *Transcendence* and history) in its psychology as well as its dogmatic ontology. That is, God comes into our experience *freely*, in a "word" which gives historical body to the *agape* no time can produce or capture, and we sometimes honor this freedom by responding sacrifice. The various inspirations of grace show the abiding presence of God's love in ever fresh manifestations, proportioned to a given here and now. That God does act in this free, gracious way is the key to Rahner's existential ethics. Vital Christianity serves a God whose saving will is not fettered to the abstract, universalist directives of rational ethics. God is present to our freedom in the concrete decisions of life, which are always more than mere instances of a general ethical rule.

Discernment is therefore an important aspect of the spiritual life: how do I find God's will—which is my joy and salvation—for this unique moment? Rahner discusses the problem in the general context of the pneumatic, charismatic dimension of the Church, but his specific source is the program for decision embodied in St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. In Rahner's interpretation, the "consolation" which signals and confirms a properly ordered choice is the existential rightness of a human freedom that is resting in God. It is the rule of God's mystery over our finite problem and decision, when we choose only what seems to obey the gospel.

The same Incarnational balance which steadies Rahner's spiritual theology of faith, grace, and dedication preserves a peaceful twofoldness in his theology of vocation. Just as the enfleshment of the Word brought God's infinity into our world, so that his image has pitched its tent never to leave, so too the people of God stand in the world as the concrete focus of an eschatological (definitive) love which transcends the world. The Church is a "sacrament" of salvation, testifying that God's mercy comes freely from "without" to consecrate and secure this world. In complementary fashion, the religious and lay vocations among the people of God manifest the unified twofoldness of an Incarnational realized eschatology. Each Christian life must balance the dogmas that God is always more, yet has drawn near for our handling. Lay Christians point in the first instance to the historical, this-worldly presence of salvation. They keep before the world the enfleshment of the Word, and the practical demands of the gospel for secular justice, service, mercy, etc. The life of the counsels, too, must enfold the gospel, but its first witness is to the free otherness from which God works man's fulfillment. By formal renunciation of secular goods, the religious professes faith that God alone fills man's heart, and that sinful man is divinized through a cruciform redemption. Rahner is aware of the practical problems of finding institutional forms which effectively channel this eschatological import (perhaps especially with poverty), but his view of the core meaning of religious life is clear



enough: it reminds the world that human fulfillment is cross-won grace, and it is essential to the constitution of the Church, insofar as she must always show the transcendental otherness of the love which works salvation. Neither vocation can boast of any special privileges in Rahner's view. Both serve the good news of the kingdom in our midst, sanctifying those who make this call the beckoning which holds first place in their hearts.

What Rahner has to say of *ascesis* (properly Christian renunciation and spiritual effort) is regularly set in the context of his theology of death. Death is the great trial of human life. It infiltrates our being progressively, as we feel the abrasion of time, finitude, and physical dissolution. Death mocks our aspirations for perfect existence; it makes man, whose dynamic finality stretches out towards the vision of God, wonder whether his dark mystery is not really an absurd. The consummate act of human faith is therefore the acceptance of death's sundering, in trust that God will show himself a merciful Father who comes at our dying to take all for his love. At the end of our lives, we shall make a final, summarizing use of our freedom, choosing or rejecting life on God's terms. Thus death shows the basic passion built into human existence. Throughout life, God is the sovereign master. True freedom is opening our hearts to his rule. As Christ descended into "hell," suffering the full despoliation of death, so the Christian descends into death's darkness freely, because his God of love demands this. He knows death is the wages of sin, and he pays the price of his passover from alienation to intimacy with hope. Indeed, he may anticipate death's final surrender to God's mercy and begin the renunciation of his own autonomous sway over life early. In this way, Christian renunciation (e.g., virginity) has traditionally been linked with death. It is a more dramatic way of fulfilling the symbolic promise of every Christian baptism, where the regime of Satan and death is rejected: dying to death, Christ brings new, resurrected life. And just as death is but the prelude to full life, so too *ascesis* is not an end in itself but rather the servant of *agape*. It promotes the integrat-

ing domination of concupiscence which anticipates our immortal participation in the one cosmos of God's saving design.

### *Christian Life*

Rahner's treatment of prayer is also a balanced explanation of the Christian's poly-relationship existence. Prayer has a social, corporate side, such that the individual prays in the Church, while the Church can intercede on behalf of the individual, both now and after his death. Prayer also brings into play the dialogue of God's grace and our freedom. While progressive entry into the Christ-mystery means God's fuller possession of our hearts, so that the *koinonia* with the indwelling Trinity grows more rich, there never is a time when Christian freedom abjures the responsibility of continuing both to seek God's will in greater purity and to confess itself an unprofitable servant. Union with God is described by Rahner on the presuppositions of his theory that uncreated grace is a quasi-formal causality of God—his formative self-gift in the depths of our being. This means that growth in Christian life is indeed our fuller entry into God's life. Such a concentration on the essential element of Christian sanctification enables Rahner both to correlate infused contemplation with lower levels of union and to keep secondary phenomena, such as visions and prophecy, in their subservient place. The great grace of all life is God himself, whom Christ has brought to the world definitely. That the absolute mystery has joined himself to us in love is good news we shall never sufficiently appreciate. Perhaps prayer is especially valuable because it meets God's mystery directly. It dares to call the unlimited sovereign who could annihilate its puny breath "father," believing that he numbers the very hairs of our heads. Thus, it actualizes the humble faith which conquers the world—perhaps especially a world which thinks God "missing."

Rahner's own honest deportment in his religious writings is also an indirect lesson in Christian conduct. His prayers are models of direct, uninhibited outpouring to God. They indi-

cate, again, the basic realism of his Christian faith; our belief is the primary guide to how things are. So there is little artificial formality in Rahner's religious writings, and much concern for the concrete stuff of daily life. On the other hand, the presence of God, who should be adored simply because he is the absolute holy one, is a constant call for reverence. Thus, Rahner capitulates neither to sloppy modernity nor to stuffy classicism. His effort is to render things as they truly are, and to respond to this nuanced, demanding reality most honestly. Still, I see in his writings a preference for the solid, deep, ultimately ineffable and direct mystery of God's quiet presence. At the depths of a man's epitomizing heart, existence is unspeakably simple and full. The best "religion"—adherence to God—is the silent adoration which lovingly lets him be God. This is practice of what will be the Christian's eternal work and joy.

Rahner's freedom from artificial constraints enables him to be traditional, in the sense of consciously respecting the regular teaching of the Church, yet responsive to the current problems of really Christian living in a time of drastic change. This is a happy combination, offering the reader some assurance that he is listening to a theologian too serious to be concerned whether he is "liberal" and popular. Rahner sees Christ precisely as God's final word, defining the basic stance God bears towards us irrevocably. And he holds the core traditional interpretation of Christ which Scripture and the magisterium present as an unchangeable pronouncement on the fundamental build of human existence. However, because God spoke his word into history, to a believing community on the march, there will necessarily be fluctuation and growth in Christian dogma. Such a growth could never deny cardinal points of faith taught by the Church previously, but it might well augment them, or set them into new relations, under the force of greater human experience. Thus, the one simple yes God spoke in Christ is identically addressed to us today, but it comes to a technological society with different overtones than those which echoed in the first century. Only the living, communicating faith of Christians who bring their New Testament

belief into combination with twentieth century experience, under the afflatus of the Spirit, can make God today what he was for Augustine—beauty ever ancient, ever new.

Christian spirituality today will therefore present the same essential visage as that of past ages, because all authentic spirituality reflects Christ, from whose face shines the one saving light. Basic charity, hope, and faith make Christians people who take life seriously, but with joyous expectation. Today we live in a unifying world, which growingly approaches one single shared culture. In this way, technology is really accomplishing a universalization of the gospel which myriad missionaries never could. Certainly the strands of Western culture which accompany industrialization carry a questionable amount and quality of Christianity, but Rahner seems optimistic that this could well work on God's previous presence to non-Christian peoples in unknown grace, helping them towards a growing acceptance of life in Christian terms. This global, hopeful view is perhaps the most distinctive emphasis he places in treating of faith for today. We live in a world where God more obviously transcends all particular representations of him—where he appears only as the silent absolute who cannot be identified with the world. We therefore must believe that he who is greater than all we know or can imagine does indeed guide the world towards himself in love. We will exercise this belief by taking the history of our time seriously, viewing all men as brothers in a common human destiny, and setting our Christian faith forth as the religion of the absolute future, which confesses Love to be the guarantor of man's time—its fulfilling horizon and final consummation.

### *Conclusion*

After this brief survey of the main themes of Karl Rahner's theology, and of their balanced formation of his teaching on the spiritual life, we might conclude with an opinion about

the peculiar utility of Rahner's views for serious Christian living today. I find them unparalleled help in investigating the meaning of the gospel for a very complex time of transition.

Perhaps the most satisfying characteristic of Rahner's theology is its balance. Passion and calm, simplicity and complexity, tradition and present needs, mystery and very particular concern all get their due. The over-all impression is of a very vital personality setting all its resources in the service of mediating the gospel to men: for him the gospel is Christ's unique good news of salvation—the single absolute criterion of what is real and good, and men are variable spirits in the world, whose essential need for the absolute God is always expressed in changing, historical modes. It is at the exact juncture of time and eternity, gift and reception that the Christian, who lives by the Incarnation, participates in a theandric dialogue he should publish to all men. Rahner seems to see his priesthood and theology as one absorbing effort to foster this dialogue, whose importance is the measure of man's meaning.

It is likely that Rahner will be read and praised by most people because he does bring this sophisticated, balanced attitude to bear on the live problems of current Christian theory and practice. The application of creative, profound theology to real concerns of flesh and blood is a combination hard to beat. By comparison with the rest of contemporary theology, however, another characteristic strikes me as distinctive of Rahner, and perhaps instructive for today's Christian. It very much amounts to the substance of Rahner's spiritual theology, and perhaps the reason why what he writes can so often be placed in this category.

Far too seldom today does one find indications of a profound religious experience, which tutored intelligence sets at the heart of theology. Beneath the legitimate concern for empirical questions of pastoral theology, and what might be called the theology of contemporary culture—which Rahner himself certainly has not neglected—is there not still a single, comprehensive question which theology can never long neglect

without starting to trivialize the Christian dialogue? If Christ is the Word of God spoken to the depths of the human heart, where man is one throbbing query about meaning, then the neglect of man's deepest experience—that he is unlimited desire for all-healing love—is bound to devalue theology. It is no accident that Rahner comes almost to identify theology and anthropology, nor that all his writing lives off a basic concern with mystery. This mystery is no lazy fugue from the problems of the city, war, poverty, etc. It assumes them into itself, adding the strain of the *mysterium iniquitatis* to its overspilling of the mind, just as it undergirds all their workings and second-level presuppositions. This mystery, onto which we open in every significant experience of insight, making, freedom, love, or community, is our experience of God. We cannot meet God as *God* except in mystery, and if we do not meet God our lives are worthless trinkets.

The comprehensive problem of man is always to be human. Real humanity is always the more-than-mere-facticity which issues in wonder-ful philosophy, art, science, issues in deep human relations of love stronger than death and in moments of quiet awe which one can only call prayer. Real humanity is therefore impossible without an awareness of mystery—a living with “all” which, by “faith,” opens man to the existence-structure it alone can give. It seems to me the signal triumph of Rahner's theology that living, Christian encounter with the mystery of God always rules his predicamental concerns. This sort of theology once was unquestioned: it is the symbiosis of thought and love, science and piety unchallenged in the Church Fathers and canonized in the Church Doctors. Today this simple unity, where theology is just the express side of Christian life, dialectically in concert with wordless love for the deeper appreciation of substantial *agape*, is perhaps more difficult. Contemporary man must live pragmatically, for his world pushes upon him endless things to do. This implies that the gospel will only be respected when it gets results. Rahner's theology suggests to me that the results for which the gospel aims are diverse and several-leveled, but that the core of all

its efficacy is the accepting of the absolute mystery of existence, which is our experience of God, as the saving love published by Jesus Christ.

The efficacy of the gospel is its power to humanize, its ability to help men live the reality which is and make the reality which ought to be—the primary reality which is the enveloping mystery of existence. How good to find a theology which rests in this mystery (thereby making faith the universal human issue), and which then moves to all the many problematic ways in which the mystery, whose silence really grounds and enables our human freedom, must be honored by responsible daily living. Because Jesus Christ declares the essential mystery of human life, reminding us tirelessly that the kingdom of heaven is the sole pearl of great price, the *unum necessarium*, he is himself man's essential good news. Because he and his people draw the implications of this mystery for particular concerns of daily living, theology must constantly hone its knife on the whetstone of private and social experience. Karl Rahner offers contemporary Christians a vast corpus of theological investigations which keep mystery and experience in constant interaction. I think this may be a good expression of the basic spiritual theology we need today, and for the foreseeable future.

# Thomas Merton: The Last Three Days

*John Moffitt*

John Moffitt seems singularly suited to write about the late Thomas Merton. It would be an understatement to say that Mr. Moffitt shared Father Merton's interest and involvement in things mystical, monastic, oriental—for Moffitt was for twenty-five years a monastic member of Hinduism's Ramakrishna order. (During that time, while stationed at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York City, he edited the books of Swami Nikhilananda, including translations of the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It was in 1963, he writes, that "I discovered I was really a Westerner and became a Catholic—without, of course, losing my respect for Hinduism.") Moreover, like Merton, Moffitt is the author of several volumes of verse (*This Narrow World*, *The Living Seed*, *Adam's Choice*). And, finally, he was "invited to be a delegate to the Bangkok conference where Thomas Merton met his untimely end, and had the good fortune to live in the same four-room cottage with him for his last three days." Mr. Moffitt has recently been engaged in editing, for the University of Notre Dame, the proceedings of that Bangkok conference of monastic superiors. His regular duties are at the offices of the Jesuit magazine *America*, where he is poetry editor and copy editor. His tribute to Father Merton is from the July 1969 issue of *The Catholic World*.\*

THERE SEEMS a certain poetic justice in the fact that we should have met before the end. He had been a parlor revolutionary in the 1930's with a certain interest in

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Hinduism, who became a Catholic and Trappist monk. During the same period, I too had been a sort of parlor revolutionary with enough interest in Hinduism to have become a Hindu monk—and only thereafter a Catholic layman. He had become increasingly interested in Zen Buddhism as an adjunct to Christianity; I had done rather extensive reading in Zen upwards of twenty years ago. Both of us were poets of sorts. Our decisive difference: that he had undergone the discipline of being much in the public eye.

Thomas Merton and I finally met at a conference of Benedictine monks in Bangkok, in December 1968. As fate would have it, we shared the same four-room cottage with two other delegates—a Philippine prior and a Belgian monk. When we first set eyes on each other, it was, as far as I was concerned, as if we had always known each other. There was no need to get acquainted. We were both at home in the same subjects, and he was simple and direct as all truly large-hearted people are.

I met him on Sunday, December 8, after returning from a sight-seeing tour of the incredibly beautiful monasteries of Bangkok, the Wat Po or Monastery of the Reclining Buddha, and the Wat Pra Keo or Monastery of the Emerald Buddha. "Thomas Merton very direct and good"—this was the sole entry about our encounter in my brief diary for that day.

The Meeting of Monastic Superiors in the Far East, for which both of us had been invited to prepare papers, was an unprecedented event. It was organized by the international Benedictine group AIM (*Aide à l'Implantation Monastique*). Christian monks in authority from all parts of the Orient had gathered to hear a dozen papers on monasticism and related subjects and to discuss a number of selected topics concerned with Christian monasticism in Asia.

The conference site, on the outskirts of Bangkok, was an extensive establishment comprising a small hotel, a number of four-room cottages, a modern conference hall with a sloping, inverted V-shaped roof that came down on each side, in front, to the ground, a large guest house called Happy Hall, and a

long and narrow lake; flowering trees and shrubs brightened the grounds with color. Two or three unresponsive dogs wandered about the place.

Dom Rembert Weakland, Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order, was president of the Conference. The week-long schedule was a full one. There were two lectures each morning, Mass (concelebrated by thirty-five priest-monks) at noon, group discussions in the afternoon. Before supper was Vespers, during which the Lord's Prayer was sung each time in a different Eastern tongue. Pooling of the results of the afternoon group discussions came in the evening.

The subject I had been asked to talk on as a former Hindu monk was "Varieties of Contemporary Hindu Monasticism." I had written a paper too long to be read in its entirety, and it would have to be drastically cut. On our first evening together, I told Thomas Merton I was concerned about it. "Don't worry," he said. "You won't have any trouble. I'm not going to say exactly what I set down for my paper, either." He said it as if I were an old friend, and in such a matter-of-fact way that I banished all concern from my mind.

On both December 9 and the morning of December 10, everyone saw much of "Father Merton" (as the delegates usually referred to him) because he was called on by Père Abbé Marie de Floris, O.S.B., of AIM, to translate into English his remarks in French as moderator of the morning lecture meetings of Dom Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., the world authority on monasticism, and Father J. Amyot, S.J., a professor at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. (The latter gave a masterly talk on Thai Buddhist society that made it perfectly plain that Christianity in its present Asian form was very little needed in Thailand.) Father Merton translated with so natural a skill that one was hardly aware of his brilliance in reproducing from memory long passages of Dom de Floris's remarks. The scheduled lectures, of course, were translated into English or French by appointed translators.

On the bulletin board in the hotel were put up, each day, five sheets with the subjects for group discussion for the next

day and the name of the "animator" of the discussion; delegates could choose which group they would attend. As soon as the first day's names were announced, many more than the allowed number of ten names were entered for Thomas Merton's group. I myself had no opportunity to hear what he said on the subject of "Possibilities of an Asian Christian Monasticism," the topic for the first day, since I was in another group. But since we occupied the same cottage, we had a number of conversations on various aspects of the confrontation of Christianity and the Eastern religions—and even on the important subject of where to leave the cottage key so that all four cottage mates could find it.

I do not know how profound Thomas Merton's knowledge of Hinduism was. Though he had traveled extensively in India before this meeting, what I had read of his earlier writing about Vedānta philosophy seemed to me rather sketchy. What really interested him, it was obvious, was Zen Buddhism. "Zen and Christianity are the future!" he said to me with conviction after the discussion meeting on the night of December 9.

Because of my familiarity with Hindu mystical thought, I had always felt that Vedānta—with its "nondualist" stress on the substantial identity of the soul and God, or its "dualist" stress on their complete intimacy—had much to say to Christians in the future. I was puzzled, therefore, by Father Merton's enthusiasm for Zen over Hinduism, in contrast to the enthusiasm of Dom Francis Acharya, O.C., and Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., both of Kerala, for the insights of Hinduism. Later I felt that perhaps I understood.

In the opinion of many (perhaps not excluding Father Merton), Zen is not a religion in the usual sense, but rather a technique for attaining illumination; for this reason, they might assume, it can be "included" in Christianity without doing the latter any violence, whereas Hinduism, being a highly evolved and complete religion, is more of a "threat" in that it requires something more strenuous of Christians—a true confrontation for the sake of ecumenical dialogue. (The truth is, of course, that Zen is a religion in the usual sense—

as Father Heinrich Dumoulin, S.J., the learned Zen scholar, pointed out to me in Tokyo later, backing up his statement by showing me an impressive and obviously religious service being held in the main shrine of the So-ji-ji Monastery.) I resolved to discuss the matter more in detail with Father Merton the following day, including the meaning of the Zen experience of *satori* as compared with the Hindu mystical experience of *samādhi*. But that discussion was destined never to take place.

On Tuesday, December 10, Thomas Merton delivered his talk, "Marxism and Monastic Perspectives," as scheduled. In attendance at the conference was a team of Italian television men. Father Merton's talk was delivered to the accompaniment of whirring TV cameras and the constant moving about of press photographers. Somewhere in Italy there is a complete record not only of the speech, but of every slightest gesture he made. Perhaps for this reason, rather than for any physical one, I had to strain to follow his words. Yet it is possible too that he was not feeling as strong as usual. Despite what he had said to me about his talk, he followed the prepared outline fairly faithfully except at the end, where he seemed to depart from his subject and concentrate rather on a contrasting of Christian and Buddhist monasticism.

During his talk, which I here recall with the help of his outline and my notes, Thomas Merton made trenchant comparisons of Marxism and monasticism. Both of them, he pointed out, have something in common: a critical attitude toward the established structures of society and personal life, and a movement toward change. Both too have a tendency to abandon the essentially critical approach and substitute a kind of dogmatism where the critical elements are no longer dynamic and existential, but rigid and presumptive. He was speaking, he said, about the mystique of Marxist thinking (though not of Asian Marxism); official and dogmatic Marxism has nothing to offer the monk. Marxism's aim is economic liberation to free man from the mystifications of religion, philosophy and politics, and thus bring about an eventual

transformation and liberalization of human consciousness. Liberation of human consciousness through renunciation, detachment and asceticism, which will permit the grace of God to transform individuals and societies, is monasticism's aim.

Though the monk must not abandon his contemplative life, he declared, he too is his brother's keeper and cannot irresponsibly connive with evil. The prophetic and contemplative elements of Christian life go hand in hand. Transformation is more than mere formation (often the equivalent of conformation). In the Asian setting, he said, any mere change in the externals of monasticism is not enough; it must always be aimed at a deeper transformation of the monk and the monastic community.

Does the life of prayer led by a monk, he asked, imply alienation in the Marxist sense? Prayer and contemplation, he suggested, are in fact the truest way to recovery of what is authentically our own (what Marxists too are aiming at), because these are not "ours" in a restricted, egoistic sense. Mercy, compassion, grace—the fruits of the spiritual life—provide a dimension unknown to Marxism but essential to complete human happiness.

During the course of the talk, Father Merton added details he had not included in his prepared outline. In his view, European Marxists were not incapable of a feeling for certain qualities in Christians. The French Marxist Roger Garaudy, for instance, had been struck by the fact of St. Teresa of Avila. "We will be relevant in Marxist society," he said, "by being simply what we are." He reminded his hearers that though in Marxism matter is basic—"Man is what he eats," said Ludwig Feuerbach—Marxists in the West read Teilhard de Chardin, who understood the importance of matter. Again, he said: "All highly organized technical societies end by being totalitarian. The choices have been made for us."

Father Merton told us that the Dalai Lama of Tibet, whom he had talked with in India, admitted to him that his abbots had been blind to the threat of Communism in their country.

He repeated a telling anecdote he had heard about a Tibetan abbot at the time of the Chinese Communist occupation. The monk went on a hurried trip from his own monastery. He consulted another abbot about what was the best course for him to pursue and the friend replied: "From now on, every man has to stand on his own feet." "We cannot rely on structures any more," added Father Merton, "for they may be destroyed at any moment." He returned several times to this point of standing on one's own feet.

Near the end of his talk, Thomas Merton said: "For the Christian there is no longer Asian or European. Both Buddhism and Christianity point beyond all difference." Buddhism, he said further, has a sense of the interdependence of *all* beings.

There was to be group discussion as usual that afternoon. I was excused in order to make a second visit to the fantastically beautiful monastery compounds in Bangkok. When our party returned late in the afternoon, we were greeted by the startling news that Thomas Merton was dead. The first report we heard, based on the diagnosis of the Thai doctor who had been called, was that he had had a heart attack. But then we heard there was more than a possibility that Father Merton had been electrocuted by a large standing fan that had somehow fallen on him.

In the short period I had known him, I had come to look on him with real affection. It was my urgent hope that he had indeed had the heart attack before having touched the fan, and pulled it over on himself as he grabbed it for support. Since I was living in the same cottage and was present very shortly after the event, perhaps it will not be out of place to report what I know of the accident.

In mid-afternoon on December 10, the monk who lived on the second floor of our cottage, opposite my room, heard a sound—something, he said to me, like a small cry. Now, all through the day we could hear various sounds from the cottage—shouts of children, the barking of dogs, bird calls—so that one more sound was not likely to catch the attention. But

something about this sound must have troubled the monk; he descended the stairs and asked the prior who lived opposite Thomas Merton's room whether he had heard anything. This latter monk had been taking a bath—which in Thailand, as in most of the Orient, involves pouring water over yourself with some amount of splashing—and he answered from the bathroom he had heard nothing. The first monk then returned to his room.

After perhaps a half hour, he descended again and tried Thomas Merton's door. It was locked from inside and there was no answer when he knocked. The partition was a rather flimsy one, with about four feet of thin wooden paneling below, above which was screening across the whole width of the room. About a foot and a half of some thick curtain material hung at the bottom of the screening, making it difficult to see inside. When he managed to get a look into the room, he saw Father Merton on the floor. The monk now became alarmed and called an abbot, a younger man, from nearby, and the abbot forced his way through the upper panel of the door.

Inside he found Thomas Merton lying on his back, his body in a corner of the room opposite to the side his bed was on. He was wearing only a pair of shorts. On top of him was a large electric fan, a floor model about five feet tall, with a wide base perhaps two feet in diameter. The motor was not running, but it was shooting off sparks. Father Merton's right side was burned a deep red by the motor, above his shorts. When the abbot tried to lift the fan off him, he received a shock.

The police were very slow in coming. When I arrived at the cottage to remove my belongings, as directed, to Happy Hall, I found Dom Rembert still sitting outside the front door. As I passed the open door of Thomas Merton's room, I could see him lying just where he fell, the deep red burn clearly visible down his side. It had all happened so swiftly and illogically that his death hardly seemed real. Thomas Merton had been with us in the morning; now he was no longer there.

That same morning, before Father Merton's talk, Father

Amyot had described in his talk on Thai Buddhism the common people's simple belief in the existence of spirits. We now received striking confirmation of what he had told us. Almost, as it were, automatically, the servants entered the cottage, removed the partition and the ceiling of the room, cleaned out the whole house, and removed the dirt and shrubbery from in front of the windows of Father Merton's room. Lights were kept burning each night thereafter—how many nights I do not know. In the Bangkok newspaper accounts of the death, there was no mention of where it had occurred; many people would otherwise have refused to visit the place.

It was out of deference to the Thais' feelings that we three inmates of the cottage had been moved to other buildings. A monk living nearby was approached by one of the servants. "Are you afraid of spirits?" the servant asked him. "No, of course not," said the monk. "Then why did all of them run out of the building?" asked the servant.

Group discussions had, of course, been cancelled, and at night monks, by turns, kept vigil by the body. In place of the scheduled lectures the next morning, a requiem Mass was said at 10 A.M. There were three principal concelebrants with thirty-five priest-monks assisting. It was a solemn and impressive but not at all sad occasion. From this time on, a strong feeling of community manifested itself at the conference. All seemed to sense that they were caught up in an undertaking—the readaptation of Christian monasticism, and indeed of Christianity itself, to the Asian world—whose ultimate consequences they could only dimly perceive. It seemed clear to some of us, too, that this momentous meeting of monastic superiors in the Far East, whose purpose was so close to the heart of this earnest and unassuming monk, was thenceforth in a special sense inspired with his spirit, having been, as one of the delegates from India wrote to me afterward, "sealed with the blood of Thomas Merton."

One day shortly after his death, the Abbot Primate, Dom Rembert Weakland, and another monk were walking along the long and narrow lake between the hotel and the conference



hall when four creatures that looked like small crocodiles came out of the water onto the grass. As the monks watched, fascinated, one of the creatures seized a dog that happened by, tore it apart and devoured it. Later I told the incident to a friend of mine who is a student of world mythology. "How fitting," he said. "The crocodile has always stood for the Abyss. In the Buddhist scriptures there is a discussion of whether a dog has consciousness. The message is clear: the individual consciousness has been swallowed up in the abyss of the Godhead."

*IV. Philosophical and  
Theological Variations*

# Towards a New Theology of Presence

*Samuel Terrien*

In the view of Samuel Terrien, a reappraisal of contemporary Christians' spirituality—in terms of both faith and style of life—is urgently needed. It is urgent because "a new sense of cosmic solitariness and a new anxiety of impotence are gripping the throat of technological man in the final decades of the twentieth century." Having described the present-day situation in telling terms, Dr. Terrien goes on to testify to a concept and worship of God which recognizes not only the absence of God but the presence of God in his very absence. "Through participation in Being, however imperfect as it may be through 'the frailty of our nature,' we are able to discover the meaning of creation as re-creation, and we become strangely conversant with the Reality which embraces even the immensity of the cosmos." Davenport Professor of Hebrew and the Cognate Languages at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Dr. Terrien is the author of such books as *The Bible and the Church: An Approach to Scripture* and *The Power to Bring Forth*. His essay first appeared in the Spring 1969 issue of *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*.\*

CAN THERE BE a new style in spirituality? Why should anyone even dare to embark on a journey towards a new theology of presence? Certain realities which confront man within and without do not change, in spite of the cultural explosiveness of our time. The cry of an infant just born, the wonder of discovery when two youths face one another at the first dawn of love, the tearing of death—nay, the obscene affront of ephemerality to permanence: these remain. We are born,

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we love, we procreate, our children are born, and we die. Worse, they also die whom we love.

If Christian spirituality reflects and determines our response to such existential moments, is it not either naïve or presumptuous to search for new forms, new directions in faith and style of life? At first sight, we may think so, but when we sustain our glance, we soon discern an urgency to reappraise "the tested and trusted ways," especially in the style of our spirituality.

### *Solitariness and Impotence*

The reasons for the urgency of such a reappraisal are obvious: a new sense of cosmic solitariness and a new anxiety of impotence are gripping the throat of technological man in the final decades of the twentieth century. Mr. MacLeish gave a wistful voice to this mood, the other night, when he described the denizens of the planet Earth as "brothers together . . . in the eternal cold." Brothers together? This expression ironically reveals the new anxiety of impotence. Earthlings are aware of the "balance of terror" which allows them to survive from day to day on borrowed time. In the eternal cold? These words describe the new sense of cosmic solitariness which secular humanism attempts bravely and sometimes nobly to overcome. The church has preached brotherhood but it has failed, by and large, to incarnate the gospel in a community of nations. No wonder if modern man tends to repudiate the God of traditional theism. At the same time, the nineteenth-century idea of scientific progress has led to profound misunderstanding. Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud have made definite and probably irreversible contributions to modern knowledge. Nevertheless, their hypotheses on biological evolution, the economic structure of society, and the power of the unconscious, respectively, have raised in the average mind hopes of happiness which have not been fulfilled.

Twentieth-century discoveries in astrophysics, in cellular

and molecular biology, and in other sciences, together with spectacular advances in technology, have added their impact. Contemporary man is torn apart between a pride of self-sufficiency in the universe and a fear of failure in human relations. He thinks he can dominate nature, but he knows also that he can blow up his world. Even if he succeeds in establishing a *modus vivendi*, he obscurely suspects that the curse of work will merely be exchanged for the curse of boredom in leisure. *Taedium vitae* among the rich may be just as bad, in the end, as economic struggle among the poor.

Many signs indicate that the loss of the sense of transcendence has not assuaged the spiritual quest. A strange hunger for infinity remains. André Malraux, the French Minister for Cultural Affairs, began his literary career as a lover not of the arts but of mankind. He formerly made eloquent pleas for social justice in Asia, Africa, and Spain. Latterly, however, he has turned to the cultivation of aesthetic values. Now, no one should fail to recognize the religious significance of the arts. Too often and too long, Christendom has fomented a pathetic attitude of obscurantism which ignores the spirituality of the artist. Nevertheless, when Malraux tells us that the love of the arts has become for us the only legitimate substitute for our fathers' belief in immortality, we may pause and wonder. Artistic creativity and appreciation, in spite of their metaphysical overtones, can hardly do more than point to our ultimate destiny. Similar reflections seem to be appropriate for other forms of aesthetic hedonism, modern fascination with exotic cults (especially the Western parodies of Zen Buddhism), and the various attempts to escape into a psychedelic paradise.

The furious concern for the arts which characterizes our epoch can only testify to the obsolescence of our sense of transcendence. It also stresses vividly that man always desires to go beyond the limitations of his proximate existence, to transcend the spatial and temporal finality of his being, and to participate in the reality of Being itself according to a mode of inclusiveness and permanence.

*A Hidden Reality*

One should not attempt even a brief analysis of the possibility and of the character of such a participation in the reality of Being without a prior formulation of Christian faith in the language of contemporary theology. Such a formulation, however, exceeds the limits of this discussion. Let it be merely recalled that spirituality always reveals a certain theology, and that any theological formulation always presupposes a certain style of spirituality.

Beliefs in the God of traditional theism are now obsolete, not only because such beliefs have been fatefully compromised by the failure of the Christian institutional churches to bring forth a viable community among the peoples of mankind, but also because such beliefs correspond to a philosophical worldview which is no longer compatible with the scientific discoveries of modern time. Atheism, however, means only the rejection of a certain form of theism. The so-called radical theologians of the past decade have rendered a signal service to Christian faith when they have spoken, however clumsily or notoriously, of the myth of the death of God. They meant with Friedrich Nietzsche that modern man has murdered God. This brand of atheism is genuinely compatible with the demands, the sharpness, and the scandal of biblical faith.

In ancient Hebraism and in early Christianity, faith was not simply the assurance that in the end, *tout s'arrange*. Biblical faith was rather the response of man to the presence of a God who manifested himself by his absence more often than through theophanies, ecstatic visions, suprasensual experiences, or even a romantic feeling of *enthusiasm* (a word which refers in its etymological meaning to the state of being "enthused" or immersed within the Godhead).

At the depth of the *Weltschmerz* which seized the civilized nations in the sixth century B.C., when the tyranny of Babylon had seemingly engulfed all hope for a better future, the great prophet whom we call "Second Isaiah" coined a new

expression, "the self-concealing God." Centuries later, at the time of a more subtle crisis, when a scientist like Galileo and a philosopher like Descartes had to endure the tyranny of ecclesiastical stupidity and malevolence, Blaise Pascal used the expression of the old prophet, Second Isaiah, to describe Christian faith. "*Toute religion qui n'affirme pas que Dieu est caché n'est pas vraie! Vere tu es Deus Absconditus!*"<sup>1</sup> It is chiefly because the church (i.e., the professional religionists) have in the past century misunderstood or even ignored this cardinal aspect of biblical faith, the hiddenness of God, that we have entered the age of secularity.

### *Divine Elusiveness*

Alone in the ancient Near East, the Hebrews developed a theological expectation of divine presence in absence. They worshipped a God whose disclosure was endowed with a certain quality of elusiveness. For generations of the biblical age, indeed for more than twelve hundred years, ancient Israel prayed to a hidden God. In the celebration of her festivals, she commemorated the intervention of the Deity in her distant past ("I am Yahweh thy God who delivered thee from the house of slaves"), and she anticipated, through her cultus, the final epiphany at the culmination of history ("Behold, I shall make all things new, says Yahweh"). Besides their cultic memory and their cultic expectation, the Hebrew people hardly ever experienced the reality of divine closeness, but they summoned in the drama of their ritual ceremonies the beginning and the end of time. They transformed their past and their future into a liturgical present.

The nations rage,  
the kingdoms totter,  
He utters his voice,  
the earth melts:

The Lord of Hosts is with us,  
the God of Jacob is our refuge (Ps. 46:6-7).

The presence of God was expressed for the people at large as a sacramental memorial and a ritual anticipation of the end of time. Even within the lives of the few "men of God," presence was restricted to brief moments of vision separated by long stretches of spiritual wilderness.

Different but similar observations should be made about the early Christians. The public life of Jesus lasted only eight or ten months according to the first three gospels, from the late spring or early summer of the year 28-29 to the middle spring of the year 29-30. The church became a historical reality when the disciples of Jesus and a few women had visions of the living Lord. Although we note that these visions included not only the appearances which are described in the Synoptics and in the Fourth Gospel, but also those listed by the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 15:5-8), culminating with the specific illumination of Christ in glory on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-8), we shall also observe that such experiences took place within a relatively short period of time, and that they were soon terminated. After forty days, according to the tradition on the Ascension (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:3), or a few more weeks or months according to the testimony of Paul, the presence of God was no longer manifested through the peculiar mode of the appearances of the risen Christ. The concluding feature insists, "And he vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31). Like the ancient Hebrews, the early Christians passed through a transitional period of waiting by faith, in absence. They believed that the Lord was coming again, soon to usher in the kingdom of God, but they suffered from a crisis of delayed eschatology. The final epiphany is coming, but the day of this coming has been postponed now for twenty centuries. Thus, Samuel Beckett has his two tramps "waiting for Godot." We are waiting still. "For the time being," to borrow W. H. Auden's phrase in *Christmas Oratorio*, the followers of Jesus Christ, like old Israel, live by faith in an absent God.

The secular reaction which manifests itself in our time against the God of traditional theism ought to be welcomed by Christians. It is in fact a reaction against the corruption of



Christian faith, which is properly neither the intellectual acceptance of a propositional creed nor a mystical vision, nor even a religious "experience," but a trust upon the testimony of God to a handful of prophets, apostles, poets, and psalmists, and the sacramental participation, through eucharistic sharing, in the incarnation of their hope that the universe has a meaning and history a goal.

When we look at the Bible in its totality, we see that the experience of divine presence is limited to a few men and women in the course of eighteen centuries, and that these few, from Abraham to Paul and John the Divine, have spoken of their apprehension of the holy with remarkable diffidence. To them applies the saying of Delphi, "God neither masks nor denudes: he only signals."

### *Presence as Commission*

Without exception, however, such experiences have introduced a summons to act, a word of commission. Presence is always a shattering call to the engagement of one man into the destiny of his fellows. Nowhere in the history of mankind, either classical or oriental, do we find such a sequence of stories which bring together at once a beginning and a distant end. The figure of a single man, Abraham, a comfortable Mesopotamian of the eighteenth century B.C., member of the most advanced technological civilization of that time, is presented as the embodiment of a new form of society. He deliberately severs his ties from the static past in order to risk his future for the sake of the human race. "Get thee out. . . . In thee shall bless one another all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:1-3). This is, par excellence, the biblical speech of theophany. Throughout the centuries which followed, the people of the covenant, like Abraham, were uprooted. In almost every generation, man is asked to decide, and the decision is at once painful and thrilling. It is painful, because it means at first a renunciation. "Get thee out!" The construc-

tion of the imperative verb with a personal pronoun, *lekh-lekha*, which grammarians call a *dativus ethicus*, stresses the disruptive character of the act of departing. The presence is always at first a demand to sever bonds from the proximate past. At once, man is bid to reach the point of no return. "Let the dead bury the dead!" The threefold progression moves from larger to narrower circles of sociological allegiance: "Get thee out, not only from thy country, not only from thy family circle, but even from thy father's house!" The response to the demand requires an oblation. But it is also the vision of a dream as big as the world, as broad as the city of man, the whole of historical time: "In thee shall bless one another all the families of the earth!" Where else do we find the source of authentic universalism? Not in Plato, with his oligarchic republic of philosophers, not in the Upanishads or the maxims of Lao-Tse, but here in the biblical speech of theophany where our faith began.

There was later a temple, to be sure, where many thought the divine presence was enshrined, but such a ritual apparatus, like the techniques of all cults, became a mode of manipulation by the few against the needs of the many. And when the temple was razed by a foreign invader, prophets, psalmists, and the poet of Job deepened their understanding of pure faith. They never gave up their trust in the ultimate goal, although the God they adored did not intervene in their history. Neither did he on Calvary. This was the faith that shone in the historical figure of Jesus, whom only his disciples, slowly and reluctantly, recognized as the Christ, the image of God in man. Steeped in the spirituality of the temple, the theologians of the New Testament interpreted the life and the person of that man in terms of a theology of cultic presence. The gospel writers told the story as the prefiguration of the coming of God at the end of time. The *muthos* of the Annunciation to Mary uses the language of the disclosure of Yahweh to Moses on Mount Sinai, in the *'araphel*, the theologoumenon of darkness (Exod. 20:8), which is also the symbol of the divine presence in the temple (I Kings 8:12). "The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1:35).

The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, at the turning point of his public life, uses the same terminology. "And a cloud overshadowed them" (Mark 9:7). The story of the trial of Jesus brings in witnesses who relate his threats concerning the destruction of the temple (Mark 14:58). When he dies, attached to a Roman cross, the text adds most significantly: "And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). Once more and supremely, the motif of abandon, of distance, of hiddenness, dominates the scene. "And there was thick darkness over the face of the earth from the sixth even unto the ninth hour" (Mark 15:33). The rending of the veil is the sign of the *ekenosis*, the self-emptying, the disembowelment of Holiness for the sake of mankind in the death of Jesus (Phil. 2:7). *Vere tu es Deus Absconditus!*

Hebraic cultus made the symbolic mode of presence in darkness the principle of a new sociological reality for which there is no sociological factor of self-interest, a "peoplehood" open to all peoples. Paul, John, and the other theologians of the New Testament accept this principle but they go beyond it. They discover that, in the mystery of the new Being, the new people itself *becomes* the tabernacle of the presence: "You are the temple of God!" (I Cor. 3:16). In the eucharistic participation through the living Body of Christ, the new Beingness, God's hidden presence moves within men. Paul writes to the wretched saints of Corinth, surely not better but not worse than the wretched candidates to sainthood in the Greater New York Metropolitan area in the year of grace 1969:

Such a trust have we through Christ to Godward, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; for our sufficiency is God. . . . We behold and reflect as in a glass the glory of the Lord. Therefore we are being transformed into his own image, from glory to glory (II Cor. 3:4, 18).

This mythological language may sound obsolete to the secular mind in our time, but the tongue of spirituality has

never been accessible to the outsider. Paul means that the man or woman in Christ is not yet delivered from the limitations of finitude, such as moral weakness and mortality. The enigma of evil remains within and without. Says Paul: "We may be a dull and tarnished mirror, even a distorted and distorting sort of glass. Inasmuch as we behold the glory of the Lord, however, we also reflect it, and by reflecting it, we are being transfigured [*metamorphoumetha*], day by day, from glory to glory." Our transfiguration or metamorphosis is not the result of a mystical identification with the living Christ, let alone a ludicrous imitation of the man Jesus. It is rather an adventure in being. We are accepted as we are, and the acceptance of our guilty selves is that which calls us to sainthood.

### *Creation as Re-creation*

A journey toward a new theology of presence has not led us to abandon the mythical speech of the Bible; it has prompted us to think anew the mystery of Holy Communion. Public worship has no justification unless it expresses dramatically the theology of the hidden God at work within a universe which begins and which ends, and through a history of mankind which leads to the assurance of its fulfillment. The modes of activity by this *Deus Absconditus* become the seasonal facets of the eucharistic celebration. However, public worship is at once the source and the manifestation of a private spirituality, which is the secret offering of the self to the Being of yesterday and tomorrow. The historicity of the intervention of God within the inner life of man stands at the center of biblical faith and therefore of the eucharist. The Sacrament of the Word, from the *Kyrie* to the Gospel, the *Gloria*, the *Sanc-tus*, and the *Agnus Dei*, represents the symbolic picture of the Act of Creativity. It precedes, prepares, and permits the inward response of man to the true and lively myth of the New Being. Such a response leads to a deepening of intimacy with the self and with others.

Against other modes of spirituality, the Christian notion of presence is based on the testimony of men and women of vision, supremely on the image of Jesus abandoned, alone on the cross. Unlike the other modes of spirituality, it does not lead to a closed attitude of separation from others.<sup>2</sup> It reaches the others through participation in Being. Although the speech of prayer continues to address him as "Thou," God is never considered in Christian spirituality as "a being out there."<sup>3</sup> Rather is it a "journey inwards," without which we are never able to become aware of the reality of the others or of our true selves. Participation in Being is for us only fragmentary and intermittent. It progresses and it regresses. The point of meeting remains at the infinity of tomorrow. We never attain it in our empirical existence. We only aim to go near it in the mystery of eucharistic communion. Through participation in Being, however imperfect as it may be through "the frailty of our nature," we are able to discover the meaning of creation as re-creation, and we become strangely conversant with the Reality which embraces even the immensity of the cosmos. Our intellectual capacities are dazzled and perplexed, even and especially if we are trained in the method of empirical, scientific research. Nevertheless, we affirm creation, because we participate in re-creation.

The three astronauts could read the first eleven verses of Genesis on Christmas eve, fantastically perched on the darkness of their lunar orbit, and they were free from any sense of ridicule or intellectual embarrassment (unlike some of us, cultured minds on earth!) because they understood that the language of this ancient, oriental myth was more realistic than a lyrical declaration on the eternal cold.

When man reaches communion in Being, which never means unification through mystical identification (for the word "communion" means not confusion but "unity with"), he is able to say without compromising a whit of his intellectual honesty, "I believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth." Love of creator and creature becomes the key to the ultimate dimension of intimacy with Being.

A theology of presence in absence has an ecumenical import, for it renews the inward authority of biblical faith; it prevents Protestants from separating their spirituality or their moral activism from a life of ritual; and it also prevents Catholics, when the See of Peter is being demythologized and the heteronomous authority of papal hierarchy appears to be definitely undermined, from separating their sacramentalism from the insecurity and the risks of faith.

The spirit of a theology of presence in absence becomes incarnate in a style of prophetic sacramentalism.<sup>4</sup> This prophetic sacramentalism actualizes liturgically today the future of the human race and the ultimate destiny of mankind. Prophetic sacramentalism is never a thing but always a living ongoingness. Sacramentalism must be prophetic, because it constitutes a menace and a threat as well as a promise and a hope. Faith must be forever based, maintained, and renewed as well as transmitted by the sacramental act of communion. In the paradox of the Cross, God remains hidden, but he is nevertheless present, even if man does not have a psychological perception of this presence. The godhead hides itself into the abyss of non-being. The mystery of evil in nature and in history is placed on the very heart of divinity. In eucharistic participation, the presence is hidden more than ever. Yet, the god who for Jesus was absent in the awful cry of dereliction, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" (Ps. 22:1), is made sacramentally and eschatologically present. "We proclaim the Lord's death till he come." "Tomorrow" becomes sacramentally "now." God who appears absent in the world is present at the end of history, and prophetic sacramentalism transmutes the end from a future to the present instant.

### *Identity, Unreal and Real*

Ever since Descartes, modern man has sought his identity in the thinking processes of the Renaissance: *Cogito, ergo sum*. Political ideologies and sociological directionism propose in

our time a conformism to the pattern of empirical success, so that, long before 1984, many of our contemporaries are already saying in effect, "I conform, therefore I am." Others, and especially the youth of today, revolt against this conformism of self-dilution. In reaction against the horrors of passivity, poets and dramatists as well as the ascending generation feel compelled to say, *Nauseo, ergo sum!*: "I vomit, therefore I am." But the man of faith, nurtured in the biblical style of spirituality, prefers to use the plural number, strangely finding his individual identity in the midst of the ongoing *ecclesia*, the invisible church of hidden fidelity, and this faith cries out, *Adoramus, ergo sumus!*: "We adore, therefore we are."

And thus, we move from fall to fall, but also from strength to strength, waiting with the nonchalance of the saints for an eternity which has already begun. Immortality is not the right of mortal man to live forever through the possession of this mythical element, an immortal soul. Rather is it the resurrection of the flesh, the symbolical expression of the new being, the fruit of the new creation. We are born mortal, and we take our mortality seriously. But death itself is viewed under a different light. It still expresses the finality of our existence. Yet, when man becomes open to the intimacy of Being, he acquires a dimension which goes beyond space and temporality. The expectation of passing from existential ephemerality to life is not based on empirical verification, nor does it arise from philosophical reasoning, although it is by no means irrational, and it must be thought out according to the intellectual processes of conceptual discourse. By the finality of my existence, I am able to discern the meaning of life, not as the lengthening beyond death of my existential weakness, but as the quality of my re-creation. Or, in the crisp way of Gerard Manley Hopkins,

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,  
I am all at once, what Christ is, since he was what I am, and  
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal  
diamond  
Is immortal diamond.

The myth of space, not only in its ancient and Zion-centered distortions, but also in its modern, empirical haste to posit an eternal universe of chemical mutation, always threatens the church with its constant temptation of seeking immediate security in the projection of autonomous man. The biblical myth of time remains as a constant warning against our own attempts at self-deification.

"Invoked or not God will be present," says the Delphic oracle, which C. G. Jung had engraved over the lintel of his door at Küsnacht. *Vocatus atque non vocatus Deus aderit*. Such an expectation of presence is not to be spelled out securely in a rite, a feeling, an experience, or even a creed, but it informs and permeates the spirituality of whoever takes a stand as resident alien in the assembly of those witnesses from Abraham to Paul. Their language may be quaint, but their hope is not obsolete. They wait—and so do we—for the disclosure of the New Being, adumbrated even today by the man Jesus.

*Prayer:* "I have a passion for man," said God, "that he may live and not die."

O God, how shall we respond to that divine secret?

We shall go home and pray with a new vigor and a new faith.

We shall beg for thy intention to be made clear for each one of us. To some thou wilt speak thy secret in rebuke. To others, thou wilt speak thy secret in comfort. And to all, thou wilt speak thy secret with infinite tenderness, for thou now and ever knowest our infirmities, our failures, and also our desires to please thee.

Our Father, who art in heaven and on earth,

Thy name be made holy in the secular city, thy good pleasure be done, and thy final reign begun today.

For our homes, for our city, for our nation, for thy world we pray, saying

Amen



NOTES

1. "A religion which does not affirm that God is hidden is not true. Verily, thou art indeed a God that concealest thyself!" (Isaiah 45:15).

2. Cf. C. Ducot, *Présence et absence de l'être* (Paris: Aubier, 1960), pp. 149 ff.

3. Cf. J.A.T. Robinson, *Exploration into God* (Stanford, 1967), pp. 119 ff.

4. J.-J. von Allen, *Prophétisme sacramentel* (Neuchâtel, 1964), p. 19.

# The Transcendence of God

*John Williamson*

*"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present."*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*"To worship God, one ought not to have to turn one's imagination, emotions, words, and thinking backwards to the worldly forms of another age."*

MICHAEL NOVAK

*"No one puts . . . new wine into old wineskins; if they do, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine into fresh skins and both are preserved."*

MATTHEW 9:16-17

"Is there any possibility of providing a philosophical framework for a new theological expression of the fundamental concept of transcendence?" Anglican priest John Williamson gives an essentially existentialist answer to this question—convinced as he is that "the search for God must begin with ourselves." It is an answer which, on the basis of an analysis of the nature of consciousness, finds the concept of transcendence meaningful *within* experience. New Zealander Williamson is the vicar of Seatoun-Strathmore in the Diocese of Wellington; before entering the ministry he was a civil servant. His essay, first published in *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* (Vol. III, No. 1),\* was the recipient of the Chapman Essay Prize of 1968—an award given annually by the Board of Governors of the College of St. John the Evangelist, Auckland.

## *I. Transcendence a Keystone in Theology*

The transcendence of God is the keystone in theological thinking. The traditional concept of God is of a personal being wholly other than man.<sup>1</sup>

God is the alpha and omega of all things, the source from which they proceed, the end towards which they move, the unity in which they cohere . . . the eternal reality above and beyond the changes and chances of temporary succession.<sup>2</sup>

God is also immanent in the world and it is by virtue of this that God comes within human experience. But God's immanence depends upon God's transcendence. Consider this statement: "God, who is invisible, acts in the world through men." It is a statement about God's immanence, but unless the word "God" refers to something other than man (unless we begin with transcendence), the word "God" is semantically superfluous and the statement meaningless.<sup>3</sup>

## *II. The Traditional Concept of Transcendence Arose When Rational Idealism Was the Dominant Philosophy*

All our ideas and concepts become meaningful for us within a gestalt—a particular set of ideas, a philosophy or way of thinking about the world and our place in it.

When the Judeo-Christian beliefs spread to the Western world, they had to be understood and expressed in terms of the traditional philosophy of the day—rational idealism, which had its birth in the thinking of the classical Greek philosophers.

Two central aspects in the philosophy were:

- (a) *Reason is the only guarantee of certainty.*

The Greek philosophers were intensely interested in the problem of existence in relation to change. Parmenides declared that:

- i. What is is just itself and nothing but itself: it cannot change, because to change it must cease to be what it is.

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- ii. Hence the truth about what is can only be reached by thinking and anything that contradicts the results of thought must be untrue.

Hence:

- (b) *Real existence is to be found in the rational world.*

Because the only road to certainty is reason with its laws of logic, this became the only genuine object of science. Hence Greek science was basically aesthetic in character, concerned with such categories as harmony, symmetry and proportion. The model of rational thought became mathematics in which ideal existence is not marred by natural objects.

Hence the ordinary world of physical things came to be regarded as an inferior kind of reality, patterned after the eternal forms but infected with non-Being, unreality and change—the objects of belief and opinion, but not genuine knowledge.

The real was the ideal beyond experience reached by rational thought.

This was a vastly different set of basic pre-suppositions from those of the Jewish writers of the scriptures, but for many centuries the traditional philosophy of the Western world could be described as 'a series of footnotes to Plato'.<sup>4</sup>

Given this philosophical outlook, God's essential Being must lie in the ideal world beyond experience. Our experience of God can only be a distorted image of a perfection beyond experience.

### *III. Empiricism Now the Dominant Philosophy*

Today, the philosophy of Rational Idealism no longer has an undisputed hold on the way Western man thinks about the world. Its place has been taken by the philosophy of empiricism.

One difficulty in the rational approach to existence was that the process of logical reasoning was only internally certain. It did not necessarily refer to anything that existed in sense experience. It would not get from essence to existence. Hence the major stumbling block in the ontological argument for God's existence. As Kierkegaard put it: "Thought in abstracting itself from existence is dealing with itself, not with existence." <sup>5</sup>

It seemed necessary to find some way of distinguishing between concepts (however internally valid) which existed in the world of experience and those which existed simply in the mind. Hence attention turned from the state of consciousness to the objects of consciousness, and the seeds of empiricism as a philosophical attitude were planted—to mature with the rise of liberalism and science about the year 1600. Since then, as Heidegger points out, the history of Western thought has been preoccupied with beings, things—with ontology, the science of the thing which is. This attitude has produced dramatic developments in science and has led to the philosophy of linguistic analysis which recognizes as objectively meaningful only those propositions which can be verified by sense experience.

This is a way of thinking, then, which claims that there can be no objective certainty about anything beyond experience itself. As John Wren-Lewis writes:

The new outlook takes it for granted that the world of experience is real in itself, not a sort of television-screen image of a different reality, so that the notion of giving meaning to experience by reference to supposed realities behind the scenes makes no sense. . . . [The new outlook] makes people find traditional religious images meaningless, because they do not seem to *refer* to anything: modern man sees no sense in a God "out there" because he has no sense of there being any "out there." <sup>6</sup>

From an empirical point of view to talk about the transcendence of God is objectively meaningless. The only meaning it could have is within a psychological or sociological con-

text. The problem of God's transcendence for thoroughgoing empiricists is vividly portrayed in Geddes MacGregor's "Great Man" who never ever appears.<sup>7</sup> God "slips over the horizon" of human experience and becomes an abstraction like Aristotle's Unmoved Mover.

No doubt empiricism is not the final philosophy of man. But it does happen to be the philosophy which Western man breathes in (in diluted form) with the air in which he exists. It is the philosophy which he takes for granted even if he has never heard of the name of it. Unfortunately, along with its practical benefits to mankind it brings one drastic disadvantage. As prophetic philosophers have recognized, its concern for the object of experience has encouraged the idea that man himself is an object in experience. At the social level this has resulted in man losing his status as an individual person and becoming a thing.

And if a transcendent God exists he must be proved to exist as one thing among others—which is philosophically impossible and theologically absurd. This attitude that there is no thing, no authority beyond our own experience of the world, has had profound practical effects in the social and moral spheres. John Wren-Lewis, for instance, has suggested that "Great numbers of broken homes witness to the fact that people no longer have any belief in a mystical sacramental bond in marriage 'behind' the personal relationship and the legal contract."<sup>8</sup> It has, too, had a marked effect on the life of the church. On the one hand, the air of uncertainty about the "existence" of a God we cannot see has resulted in a refocusing of Christian debate on secondary things one can more objectively observe in action, measure, and discuss—the Church and the Christian Faith.

Probably more gets written on the Church nowadays than on any other single theological theme. Most of this writing has a practical orientation. We hear about the Church in relation to rapid social change, the Church in a secular society, the Church and reunion, the Church in mission. . . .<sup>9</sup>

And the spectacular progress of science, a child of empiricism, has hastened the retreat of God from the centre of the stage into the wings.

As science penetrates further and further into life—in physics, astronomy, psychology and biology—religion, seen as a relic of the myths of a prescientific age, moves in the periphery of life. There have been various attempts to save God from this obsolescence. Some hold that what we need to do is to polish up the old images, revive with vigor the traditional ideas and communicate them across the cultural chasm. One way of trying to do this is by “demythologizing”—cutting away the mythological way of thinking and getting back to the empirical truths lying underneath this undergrowth. Another counter has been to admit the boundaries set by empirical inquiry and to find a way of making the word “God” meaningful *within* experience. This leads us to consider another branch of philosophy which is having a considerable effect on our ways of thinking—existentialism.

#### IV. *Existential Philosophy*

Existential philosophers are trying to find a new basis for understanding man's existence. Because traditional philosophy has become so often “a storehouse of inadequate answers to man's eternal questions”<sup>10</sup> there is need to take a new look at the roots of philosophic thought.

Heidegger has drawn attention to the long history of one-sided development in Western philosophy which has concentrated on the objects of being rather than in Being itself. There is need to think again about “Being” rather than “beings.”

For Nietzsche there were two reasons why a new kind of philosophy was needed. In the first place man needed to discover himself in the face of depersonalizing forces overwhelming him in nineteenth-century Europe. But this could no longer be achieved via the traditional metaphysical explana-

tions because the work of Darwin has rendered these obsolete. It was no longer necessary to invoke a supernatural directing agency. Hence Nietzsche saw his task was to face the implications of this new state of affairs and to work out a new description of reality which would take into account Darwin's theory of evolution.

What is at the center of man's inquiry about the world? The Idealist would place reason there and exclude his experience of change; the empiricist would focus on what man experiences and exclude his subjective experience of it. But we too easily assume a clear-cut distinction between ourselves and the world "out there." Our experience of the world is in a real sense passive: it is something we find ourselves already involved in—something we receive and grasp as already present.

The existentialist starts from man's existence. If it were not for man's consciousness of existence there would be no question to answer. Only man is conscious of existence and is able to ask questions about it. In Heidegger's words: "In the fundamental question, 'Why is there Being rather than nothing?' one kind of being persists in coming to the fore, namely, the men who ask the question."<sup>11</sup> From the existentialist standpoint, if you want to answer the question, "What exactly does exist?" the only way you can approach an answer is through an understanding of man's existence.

Both the Idealist and the empiricist are primarily concerned with the reality of concepts. The existentialist prefers to deal with the reality of the basic experience of man's existence-consciousness.

Philosophy is not the science of "the eternal"—not even the science of eternally and necessarily valid forms of reasoning which is the form that the "Greek idea" takes today—but rather the progressively achieved awareness of what it means to be conscious."<sup>12</sup>

Husserl's phenomenological method provided a means for studying this progressive awareness. This recognized the distinction between the object of which we are conscious and



consciousness itself, which is always of something other than itself. In his words, it is always "intentional." This consciousness-of-something is the primary data for existence. We cannot separate the two terms ("consciousness" and "something") except temporarily for closer investigation in isolation and we cannot get beyond or behind it. This means that the basic factor in experience is not a concept but a non-conceptual consciousness or awareness.

## V. Consciousness

### (a) *Consciousness is our basic data*

Empirical philosophy recognizes immediate pre-reflective experience, but relegates it to the realm of private sense-data or impression, essentially non-communicable and therefore secondary. Its very subjectivity excludes it from objective observation. Yet this objectiveness is obtainable only by moving away from the immediate experience itself, trying to stand outside it and reflect on it, think about it, select and abstract from it. It is thinking about something that is secondary. Logic is a derived science. The deepest foundation of experience is not a concept but a perception, an awareness, a consciousness of something.

Only in this way, for instance, can we understand the illusive idea of freedom. Sartre makes the point that is not that man *has* freedom but that he *is* free. Freedom is not an aspect of his being but the ground of his being. Jaspers makes much the same point when he says that the ground of freedom is not a knowable structure; only by starting from freedom can I find freedom. I can only acknowledge and accept it, I cannot produce it. I can receive it and at the same time keep moving towards it.

### (b) *Consciousness can be expressed in different ways*

Our basic experience of awareness or consciousness can be expressed either through concepts or through non-conceptual

media such as paradox, verbal or non-verbal symbols or art forms. It is generally assumed that non-conceptual forms of expression are inferior to concepts, but this is not necessarily so. It depends on the fundamental philosophic attitude adopted—perhaps quite unthinkingly.

(c) *Consciousness is found in art, religion and science*

It is very much the world of the artist who seeks to express and communicate an experience which defies conceptual analysis or expression. H. D. Lewis writes:

We have in art an awareness of reality in a form that is least reducible to the categories of our own thought; the world being thus presented in a way that has clearer traces of a sphere beyond that of finite experience itself. . . .

. . . underlying all the incidental obscurities of art, there must be a rarer illumination than anything we can achieve in ordinary thought, if also of a very different nature. . . .

Art concerns not the universal, but the individual aspect of reality . . . Art uncovers for us the character of particular things in the starkness and strangeness of their being what they are.

What is said as poetry here is sharply defined but also elusive. We could not lay hold of it in any other way. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Otto, in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, discovered the same non-conceptual elements in the experience designated by the word "holy." He found that "the most essential and important aspects of the holy involve a clear overplus of meaning which completely eludes apprehension in terms of deniable concepts." <sup>14</sup>

And even within the kingdom of empiricism it is not absent. W. G. Pollard made the point that:

Every one of the sciences is, for those who engage in it, shot through with experiences of great power and primary validity which never enter into the conceptual scheme that it is the primary task of science to elaborate.<sup>15</sup>

He emphasizes that this is not merely a residue of unexplored scientific knowledge: "In the presence of a nuclear reactor in

operation a profound sense of mystery and awe comes over me, and all the more intensely the more one knows conceptually about what is taking place in it." <sup>16</sup>

(d) *Consciousness transcends itself*

We can be conscious of a purely mental state (e.g., in imagination or in a dream or when I am conscious of the fact that I am conscious of something). But usually consciousness is of something other than itself; something which transcends itself. As Husserl comments:

"... the physical thing which it (the cognitive act) intends or supposedly perceives or remembers etc., is not to be found in the cogitatio itself, as a mental process ... it is not something which really exists within the cogitatio." <sup>17</sup>

The traditional question is "What is this consciousness of?" "What is out there?"

Existential phenomenologists would say that this question is a no-exit road. They would prefer to look at it this way: All we can ever know are appearances of things in consciousness—their immanent reality. This reality extends beyond consciousness but we can't get beyond the limit of consciousness. Therefore it is no use trying to get at reality-in-itself. "... by virtue of intentionality the very notion of a reality in itself or of an absolute object becomes absurd and in any case unthinkable." <sup>18</sup> There is no such thing apart from our consciousness of it. We can't break up the basic experience of consciousness-of-something. On the one hand, we can't have consciousness without it being *of* something. On the other hand, if we aim at finding the object-in-itself we lose ourselves in the process. Our focus of attention must be not either consciousness-in-itself or in the object-in-itself but on the intentional act.

... to make the world appear as phenomenon is to understand that the being of the world is no longer its existence or its reality, but its meaning, and that this meaning of the world resides in the fact that it is a cogitatum intended by the cogito. [This reveals] not the cogito alone but ... consciousness-of-

the-world, consciousness constituting the meaning of the world." 19

This means that we meet with being within consciousness, not outside it.

It is important to notice that there is here no denial of the reality of the world outside. The object outside consciousness is not constituted by consciousness, as the Idealists were cornered into maintaining, but it is given to consciousness.

### (e) *The Encompassing*

From a somewhat different starting point, Jaspers comes to the same basic attitude. Man, he says, is open to something he is not yet—something other than the finite now. This something to which he is open, "The Encompassing," can never be known empirically—just because it is beyond the finite. All we can ever know is its partial disclosure in the world of Dasein: "The Encompassing never appears as an object in experience," and at the same time "only what appears to our consciousness as experienceable, as an object, has being for us." 20 Philosophy can open the mind to the Encompassing, but it can never conceptualize, define or systematize it. "... in no case can it be grasped as though it were something in the world which appeared before us . . . we do not appropriately cognize it as an object; rather we become aware of it as a limit." 21

Sartre comes to much the same idea. Consciousness is always contingent; it depends on something beyond itself. Yet we cannot properly investigate this beyond consciousness. All we can investigate is the being of appearance.

We do not know the Encompassing empirically. If we did it would no longer be other than Dasein. Thus, for Jaspers, one can talk meaningfully about transcending and transcendence, but it is not possible to refer to the transcendent. Verbs are in order, but not nouns. Nevertheless it is because of the Encompassing that we do become aware of things empirically. William Earle in his introduction to Jaspers' *Reason and Existenz* puts this point clearly:

The situation is as though we stood in a small pool of light encompassed by the vast darkness. Someone calls attention to the encompassing darkness; where is it, the others cry, turning their torches out to light up and see the darkness, but of course they see nothing but more and more illuminated areas. Nevertheless, can we not be aware of this darkness as the limits of our light? The eye cannot literally *see* the dark, but is it not aware of it? And, Jaspers would insist, we must be aware of that darkness if we are not to forget what light means.<sup>22</sup>

## VI. *Existence and Art*

What *is* a work of art—for instance, a painting?

It is first of all an object made of canvas, paint and wood. As such it is open to scientific analysis and description. Having done this we can then talk about it in a quite objective way. There is no place here for subjective feelings. This mode of being Jaspers calls *Dasein*.

But painting can be more than this to some people, who are able to enter into a relationship to this same subject. In Buber's terms the painting becomes a "Thou" rather than an "it"—it transcends its objectivity.

The question: "What is the subject of Michelangelo's fresco on . . . the Sistine Chapel ceiling?" may be answered in three different ways, each of which is approximately correct.

Some will reply, briefly, "Jonah."

Others will answer, "A young man of superb muscular development, sitting under a spray of fig leaves, with a monstrous fish and two child angels in the background."

Others, more acute, will say, "The subject of the picture is 'What a piece of work is man.'"

A few, wisest of all, will realize that the full answer cannot be put in words. The picture is thought and feeling molten together, an arcanum of sensation from which we emerge with our faculties enhanced, our imagination fired, our energy stimulated, our hopes lifted to heights invisible from the dead level of our everyday existence.<sup>23</sup>

The painting can no longer be defined as or confined to an object "out there"; it can only be understood in terms of consciousness-of-something, in which the "something" is open to all kinds of possibilities. The greater the painting the more inexhaustible the possibilities of insight and appreciation.

Normally the empirical object is there as the symbol of all that the relationship means. This symbol is less material when the art form is music. Where, for example, is Beethoven's Emperor Concerto? Is it in the paper and ink of a manuscript—or is its being contained within any particular performance or present of this music? What the concerto is can never be explained or defined in empirical terms, although from a phenomenological point of view it is quite intelligible—as consciousness-of-something. We could even go a step further and say that from the point of view of the artist the existence of an empirical definable object is of no importance at all. It has been argued that a work of art exists initially and essentially in the mind and imagination of the artist: ". . . a work of art may be completely created when it has been created as a thing whose only place is in the artist's mind."<sup>24</sup> Later in the same article Collingwood goes on to say:

The actual making of the tune is something that goes on in his head, and nowhere else . . . . The artist . . . may go on to do something else which at first seems to resemble this: he may do what is called publishing it. He may sing it or play it aloud, or write it down, and thus make it possible for others to get into their heads the same thing which he has in his. But what is written or printed on music-paper is not the tune. . . .<sup>25</sup>

From a phenomenological-existential point of view, existence does not depend on empirical existence.

Let me now summarize what I have been trying to say by commenting on the following statement about creative painters:

Assuredly, for them as men, the world of nature is the very same reality it is for us . . . but for them as painter, it is not

in the world of nature that ultimate reality lies. They feel that there is still another reality hidden behind the appearances of nature . . . .<sup>26</sup>

- a. From a rationalist standpoint this makes sense. There is an ultimate reality beyond the appearance of things. But rationalism is no longer a generally accepted attitude of mind.
- b. From an empirical point of view this statement is nonsense. It simply expresses, as indeed the words indicate, a feeling on the part of the author. They have no objective reference.
- c. From the standpoint of phenomenological existentialism the statement is meaningful as an expression of these facts:
  - i. the appearance is what we know
  - ii. this points beyond itself to an undefinable ground from which our consciousness of things appears
  - iii. this encompassing takes form in our consciousness and in this way becomes existence for us. Gilson concludes the last sentence quoted above by saying:

. . . and that it is their own function to discover it in order to express it, or rather, *to express it in order to discover it; for indeed this metareality has to be made to be before being made to be known.*<sup>27</sup>

- d. An empirical object cannot transcend itself nor can it *be* a transcendent to human experience. But a human consciousness is capable of discovering a relationship which does transcend the empirical object; seeing it in a wider, deeper, more meaningful context.

## VII. Theology and Transcendence

There have been many movements attempting to revive the church's life in the secular world of today. Spearheads have been called stewardship, mission, communication, pastoral care, and liturgy. But behind all these lies the question, and often a fear which buries the question—does God really exist?

The most vital issue for the church today is a theological one: what does the word "God" mean in terms of the way modern man looks at his world; has it any meaning which gives God an identity of his own other than objects and situations in the world?

The Bible is sure about God's existence, and so are most theologians. But the ground of the belief lies outside their demonstrations of it. Philosophically there is no certainty in the traditional proofs of God's existence, though they may support a belief arrived at in some other ways. Even if they could prove God to exist this would, as Oliver Quick comments, "have little more connection with the reality of God, than . . . the square root of minus one has with a sunrise."<sup>28</sup>

The existential theologians talk a lot about the reality of symbols designating God's presence, but stop short of any proof that the symbols do in fact refer to something rather than nothing. It looks as though the keystone of theology is crumbling with old age.

It is, of course, possible to keep religion alive and meaningful by concentrating attention on the church as a tangible organization, by improving our techniques of communication; and to use the concepts, traditions, literature, and ritual of the church to develop human values. Religion can be morally and psychologically helpful even if it is not true. It can help us win friends and influence people and so succeed better in life. The thought of my life not being terminated at death can comfort me in this life even if that hope turns out to be an illusion. By the time I make this discovery it will have served its purpose.

Our contemporary enthusiasm for theology based on man's need and hence for man-centered church activity can be either a search for God or an escape from God. Our uncertainty about God being out there beyond experience has led to a search for God within experience. Many find this a valuable road to travel, but at the end of it hard to know whether we are involved in finding God within experience or simply treating theology as anthropology in disguise.<sup>29</sup>

Erich Fromm in his book, *Ye Shall Be as Gods*, claims that



the Old Testament is really about man, and God is simply "an expression of an inner experience," and that the Jews gave the name "God" "to the X, to which a man should approximate in order to be fully man." <sup>30</sup>

Is there any possibility of providing a philosophical framework for a new theological expression of the fundamental concept of transcendence? Existentialism may be able to do just this.

### *VIII. Existentialism and Transcendence*

Existential phenomenology has shown us that we cannot begin with an object outside consciousness coming into consciousness. There are too many problems about how this could happen. The only place to begin, therefore, is our consciousness of something. I can then ask, "What is it that I am conscious of?" This throws the object of attention onto the object of consciousness and this leads to the process of classification and abstraction in which we lose the object. The other alternative is to focus attention onto consciousness itself as the process by which we become aware of anything at all, even our own consciousness.

So the search for God must begin with ourselves. To quote Michael Novak:

The beginning of the search for God lies in reflection upon oneself. The search for God is intimately connected with the discovery of one's own identity. To come to know oneself as a subject is to abstain from assaulting oneself as an observer or an analyser. It is to learn a technique of reflection not patterned on the techniques by which we come to know objects. It is to "take possession of oneself" not as an enemy storming the walls from outside, but as one who is already oneself, but who needs to *become aware* of who one is.<sup>31</sup>

This is the only method of discovering things which exist as part of us, which are the ground of our being. If we accept

increasing awareness as a valid method of discovering that which we are, then transcendence could be thought of as the overcoming of things which limit this process. My awareness could be limited by my own physical or psychological needs, which become the glasses through which I look at my world, and distort my vision. It could be limited by my desire to know things objectively—either for honestly scientific reasons, or because of some subconscious fear of myself. The concepts I have could also limit my awareness, if I hold them defensively. The commandment against making a graven image seems to me to prohibit any concept of God which has become fixed or final, and thus stands in the way of further awareness. James Collins, writing of Jaspers' quest of transcendence, says: "We should develop the attitude of transcending by keeping our existence open in the upward direction."<sup>32</sup>

There is no end to this openness. This means that we never come to know the reality beyond our consciousness, the reality beyond being. It is certainly a strong point in the Hebrew tradition that God only reveals himself indirectly and incompletely. God is never known or approached as he is in himself, but only in partial disclosures in human situations. No man could see God and live. Erich Fromm emphasizes the Old Testament insistence on the distinction between God and an idol. An idol is a thing and can therefore be named. God cannot be reduced to that. Collins says of Sartre's ontology that it is an "... expansion of the proposition that the object of transcendence is a contradictory phantom, which can neither be realized nor exorcized."<sup>33</sup> This means that transcendence is related in its objective reference to belief rather than certainty.

The Bible contains many paradoxes relating to God's being and presence, and these are understandable in terms of this approach to transcendence. Jesus was a figure in human history, yet to his disciples he was more than a man; his being was not limited to his humanity but pointed towards something beyond. Their experience enabled them to transcend the humanness of Christ. Yet the Christian tradition holds on

to the idea that Christ was not simply a temporary appearance of God or in any way less real than God. He was, and is, "true God and true man." But in the New Testament always the concept of God was kept open and never defined or limited. Jesus is God; yet he goes to the Father: the kingdom has come; yet it is to come.

Christ made it clear to the Pharisees that if they became certain they knew God, they were blind.<sup>84</sup> Every disclosure of God is at the same time a veiling of God.<sup>85</sup>

. . . the revelation in Christ and in the New Testament is recognized by those who love, but it also lifts the level of their loving and directs their growth towards a goal they may never reach in life but which leads them ever deeper in the awareness of God.<sup>86</sup>

This unlimited (or ultimate or infinite) limit makes us aware of our being in empirical experience. Our life becomes more meaningful in a wider context and perspective. We acquire a certainty about ourselves. This is the New Testament emphasis. The life "beyond" is focused back on the reality and quality of life here and now in our present experience. It is in the life of empirical existence that our life is played. Here is reality. But it is a reality which points beyond itself and in so doing discovers itself.

## NOTES

1. John Macquarrie, *God Talk*, p. 98.
2. O. C. Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed*, p. 18.
3. Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
4. Alfred North Whitehead, quoted in Stroll and Popkin, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 357.
5. R. Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, p. 205.
6. John Wren-Lewis, "What Are Clergy For?" *B.B.C. Listener*, March, 1964.
7. Geddes MacGregor, *Introduction to Religious Philosophy*, p. 98.
8. Wren-Lewis, *loc. cit.*
9. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p. 346.
10. Pierre Thévenaz, *What Is Phenomenology?* p. 15.

11. Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, p. 3.
12. Thévenaz, *loc. cit.*
13. H. D. Lewis, *Morals and Revelation*, pp. 208, 210, 212-13.
14. W. G. Pollard, *Physicist and Christian*, p. 84.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
17. Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, p. 27.
18. Thévenaz, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
20. Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, pp. 52, 55.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
23. Bodkin, *Approach to Painting*, p. 57.
24. R. G. Collingwood, "Making and Creation," in Vincent Thomas (ed.), *Creativity in the Arts*, p. 9.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
26. Etienne Gilson, "Creation—Artistic, Natural and Divine," in Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
27. *Ibid.* (italics mine).
28. Quick, *op. cit.*, p. 10. See also Henry Duméry, *The Problem of God*, pp. 7, 25-26.
29. P. R. Baelz, "Is God Real?" in *Faith, Fact and Fantasy*, p. 65.
30. Erich Fromm, *Ye Shall Be as Gods*, pp. 18, 53.
31. Michael Novak, *Belief and Unbelief*, p. 76.
32. James Collins, *The Existentialists*, p. 113.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
34. John 9:39.
35. Michael B. Foster, *Mystery and Philosophy*, p. 47.
36. Alfred B. Starratt, *The Real God*, p. 62.

# Transcendent Divinity and Process Philosophy

*Eugene Fontinell*

Is it possible to fit God into a pragmatic world view? Can one affirm a "transcendent divinity" and at the same time dispense with "supernaturalism" and the traditional divine attributes of immutability, omnipotence, and omniscience? Eugene Fontinell answers these questions with a qualified "yes"; God is unknowable, but there is a sense in which he can be experienced. And that experience is one which, "while it will always defy precise and definitive description, is indispensable in man's effort to continually expand his horizons and thereby enrich his life." It is an experience which calls forth faith, hope, and love. Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Queens College of the City University of New York, Dr. Fontinell is the author of the recent book *Toward a Reconstruction of Religion: A Philosophical Probe* and a number of articles for religious journals. A Roman Catholic layman, he has long been a participant in ecumenical and civil rights activities. His paper was first published in the *Proceedings* of the Twenty-third Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America,\* held in Washington, D.C., June 17-20, 1968.

I INTEND TO TAKE full advantage of the fact that this is a seminar paper which as such allows for the presentation of tentative suggestions, probing hypotheses, and a simple and stark statement of one's assumptions. The hope, of course, is that such an approach will evoke a response—really a number of responses—which will serve as a stimulus and aid for

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any future refinement and development of the position which is offered. In the interest of time and space, therefore, allow me to make a blanket apology for the oversimplifications and the distortions which inevitably accompany an effort such as this.

Except as the emptiest of abstractions the concept of "transcendent divinity" has meaning only within a specific philosophical or theological context. Similarly, there does not exist any "process philosophy" as such—there are a multiplicity of process philosophies which defy reduction to clear and precise characteristics. I am going to restrict my considerations to how "transcendent divinity" might be understood within one expression of process philosophy which I will henceforth refer to as "pragmatism." I bracket the question as to whether historical American Pragmatism is merely a method and not a philosophy. As I will employ the term it signifies both a method of evaluating and resolving human problems and a metaphysics or world view. By the latter I understand a set of principles, categories and metaphors in terms of which all phenomena are to be explained.

One final introductory note—though William James and John Dewey are the primary sources for the philosophical framework which I am employing, I am not attempting an exposition of their thought as such. Further, I do not wish to saddle them with my interpretations of pragmatism or to restrict myself to their conclusions.

The distinctive feature of the processive world which pragmatism affirms is that it is processive through-and-through.<sup>1</sup> There is no part or sphere of reality which stands outside and remains untouched by process. Further, the processive world as envisioned by pragmatism is characterized by the emergence of radically novel events and realities. That is to say, events and realities emerge which are not simply the actualization of pre-existing potencies, whether such potencies are ultimately located in something called Nature or in the reality of God. Such a world, I must stress, allows for, and indeed insists upon, the need for order and regularities, but these are

always relative and in great part result from man's transactions within reality. Hence, the processive world of pragmatism is neither an eternally ordered world nor a world of chaotic flux.

Not only is this world through-and-through processive—it is also through-and-through relational. Pragmatism rejects any world composed of atomistic individuals or substances whose relations are merely *accidental*. Alfred North Whitehead has expressed this relationship most succinctly and emphatically: "There is no entity, not even God, 'which requires nothing but itself in order to exist.' . . . Every entity is in its essence social and requires the society in order to exist."<sup>2</sup> James, in order to describe this world of relations with a minimum of distortion, employed the metaphor "field"—a metaphor which has been increasingly used in such diverse disciplines as physics, psychology and sociology. It is interesting to note that in a recent book, Bishop John Robinson speaks of "the divine field" in an effort to overcome some of the traditional problems attached to any "God-talk."<sup>3</sup>

Combining the notes of process and relation, we might describe the world or reality as an ongoing relational-continuum or "field" embodying and bringing forth a plurality of sub-fields each with a unique focus but dependent upon and shading off into other fields.

A crucial feature of pragmatism is a distinctive interpretation of experience. According to pragmatism, experience is not passive or merely subjective nor is it radically distinct from reason. Instead, in the language of Dewey, experience designates *all* transactions between organism and environment. It is important to note, however, that neither the organism nor the environment is a radically independent entity—they are co-constitutive of one another. This view of experience rules out any and all metaphysical dualisms—in particular that which divides reality into subjective and objective. These latter terms express *functions* of experience rather than ultimate features of reality. An important implication of this position

is that it does not allow faith or belief to be categorized as subjective and knowledge as objective.<sup>4</sup>

While faith and knowledge are and must be intertwined and interacting, they do not play the same role and hence are distinguishable functions of man. I have argued elsewhere<sup>5</sup> that, while faith is a mode of experience, it is not a mode of knowledge. Nevertheless, faith will always utilize, involve and express itself in terms of concepts, metaphors, symbols and institutions which are drawn from or patterned after the philosophy, science and experience characteristic of a particular historical and cultural moment. This is an extremely important principle for the position which I am advocating. I believe that it allows for a maximum degree of development of faith while avoiding any anti-intellectual or emotionalistic fideism. On my terms, faith in general is justified inasmuch as human life is impossible without it. This does not mean, however, that every faith-claim is justifiable nor that all are of equal worth. Each claim must continually submit itself to the demanding test of ongoing experience.

For pragmatism, all experiences, including faith and knowledge experiences, are primarily participational and creative rather than representational. Their basic function is not to mirror an "out-there" reality but to enable man to share more fully in reality and to contribute to its development. The task of man is not simply to discover the world but also to create it, and all worthwhile experiences work to that end.

The worth of an experience, according to pragmatism, is ultimately justified in terms of the "quality of life" to which it gives rise. This does not exclude or diminish the importance of such activities as abstracting, theorizing and speculating, but it does insist that such efforts cannot be definitively evaluated in isolation from the long-range influence they have upon the developing human community. Such an approach is primarily life-oriented rather than knowledge-oriented. Knowledge is but one of a number of human experiences, each of which has an indispensable contribution to make to the development and enrichment of human life.



Where or how, one might ask, does God fit into this pragmatic world view? Negatively, God is ruled out as a philosophical or scientific principle of explanation insofar as "principle of explanation" is understood as an act of knowledge. Pragmatism, therefore, is a conscious and explicit *agnosticism* as regards God or any absolutely ultimate principle of reality. John Herman Randall has expressed this agnosticism most forcefully: "We never encounter *the Universe*," he tells us, "we never act toward, experience or feel being or existence as 'a whole.'" Hence, there is "no discoverable 'ultimate context,' no 'ultimate substance' . . . . 'Ultimate' . . . is always relative, never 'absolute'; it is always 'ultimate for.'" Thus, Randall concludes that "'the Universe,' or 'Nature,' is not 'a process'—a single process." Further, "the 'Universe' or 'Nature' does not have any single meaning." <sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that the point which Randall is here making is central to and distinctive of the kind of process philosophy which I have designated pragmatism. It distinguishes this philosophy from other process philosophies such as Bergson's, Whitehead's, Hartshorne's or Teilhard's. The point of distinction is that the empirical process philosophy of pragmatism does not admit the possibility of knowing or experiencing the process of reality as a single, unified whole. At the same time, pragmatism is distinct from more positivistic empiricisms in that it does not deny the legitimacy of thinking of or believing in reality as a single process. The propriety of such speculative constructivism is affirmed by Randall when, after denying that the Universe can be known or experienced as "a whole" or a "single process," he maintains that nevertheless "it is quite possible to take 'the Universe' as a single process, with a single 'meaning.' Most of the great philosophies have done just this, to say nothing of a multitude of religious schemes." When this is done, however, it is necessary to "invent a further 'context' for 'the Universe' or Nature"—it is necessary to construct "metaphysical myths" such as the "Unmoved Mover" or the "Unconditioned Conditioner" or the "First Cause." These myths, Randall maintains, "are logical

constructions or extrapolations, like physical theories, and they possess similar functions." Without going into the more complex aspects of these functions, suffice it to say that they serve to unify and give direction to a plurality of human and natural processes. Randall insists, then, not only that these "metaphysical myths" are not meaningless but that "they have a perfectly definite function which can be objectively inquired into. They may well be basic in the living of human life, which often gets *its* 'meaning' from their use—or rather, which uses them to find and express its 'meaning.' " 7

God, then, is unknowable, but does not an empirical process philosophy such as pragmatism admit that he might be experienced? Yes, but only in a highly qualified sense. In the first place, there is no direct experience of God such as there is of other persons or of things. Still, I have maintained that faith is a mode of experience and I now add that pragmatism does not exclude in principle the possibility of an experience which might be described as "faith in God." What I must stress, however, is that "faith in God" is not the equivalent of "direct experience of God." Perhaps I can make my point a bit clearer by calling attention to Dewey's interpretations of mystical experience. Dewey does not deny the existence, authenticity and importance of experiences usually called "mystical." He insists, however, that they cannot be employed as proofs of God's existence either for the one who undergoes such experiences or for others who recognize them in their fellow men. "In reality," Dewey asserts, "the only thing that can be said to be 'proved' is the existence of some complex of conditions that have operated to effect an adjustment in life, an orientation, that brings with it a sense of security and peace." 8

In my opinion, Dewey has quite properly distinguished "mystical experience" as a phenomenon from "mystical experience" as conclusive evidence of God's existence. I would add that if a mystic says he has experienced God, or the Absolute or Being-as-such, he is thereby making an act of faith. I am here emphasizing the radical and inescapable dimension

of faith in man's relationship to God, even in those who appear to be favored with experiences of great depth and intensity. Thus, while the philosophical viewpoint which I am espousing does not recognize either the possibility of knowing or directly experiencing God, it does not thereby foreclose the possibility of faith in him.

It seems to me that the way of describing the Christian faith in God which gives rise to the least distortion and allows for a maximum of speculation and creative reflection is to describe this faith as a personal-communal-existential orientation and relationship—a dynamic and developing relationship in virtue of which man is moved beyond himself not toward some outward or external object or goal but to a richer life which is at once a fuller realization of himself and a sharing in the life of that mysterious *Other* whom we have traditionally called God. A crucial implication of such a view of Christian faith is that any and all concepts of God, faith-symbols or religious institutions are human constructs. Note well—this does not thereby render them subjectivistic or *merely* psychological. Rather they are functions in the service of an ongoing existential relationship which one may *believe* is a divine-human relationship, at once personal and communal, immediate and mysterious.

It would seem that the Christian as much if not more than any other believer would insist upon the constructed and tentative aspects of those concepts, symbols or institutions concerning that inexpressible mystery whom *we* have termed God. Such an attitude is a protection against that temptation designated "idolatry," which attributes human expressions to God thereby avoiding our responsibility for them. Further, the recognition that our concepts of God are products of our own making enables us to avoid that fanaticism and intolerance which follows from believing that we are the chosen defenders of God's attributes. In my opinion, only a faith which allows—indeed which demands—continual reconstruction of its conceptual, symbolic and institutional expressions can enable man to avoid worshiping his own handiwork.

To insist that our concepts of God are human constructs is not equivalent to unreflectively accepting as of equal worth all God-assertions. Hence it is of utmost importance that we develop criteria by which we evaluate any and all such speculation. I have already expressed some of these criteria by implication but I would like now to state them explicitly. "Rational or natural theology," Randall maintains, "has an undying appeal, for it performs an essential function for intelligent men. But the experiments of history make clear," he goes on to say, "that the scheme of understanding employed must be a scheme which illuminates man and his experience."<sup>9</sup> Randall has really expressed the primary and controlling criterion for a pragmatic evaluation not only of God-speculation but of all speculation. As I have indicated above, the "quality of life" is the touchstone whereby all experiences are evaluated, and philosophical theology, or any theology for that matter, is no exception. Now I cannot possibly go into the refinements and difficulties attached to the notion of "quality of life," but I must emphasize that this is no abstract or transcendent norm or standard against which particular acts are judged. The human community at every moment of its existence and in its various manifestations involves a quality of life. Since the human community is and is becoming, the quality of life of any segment or of any moment of the life of this community is never absolute and definitive. Inasmuch as man has the power of idealization, or, to put it in other terms, the power to imaginatively construct new ways of being, man is never restricted to the past or present forms of life. But just as life is ongoing, so is any evaluation and that is why all judgments are tentative and relative. This does not mean that we are reduced to a whimsical individualism or a destructive nihilism; human experience is cumulative and some values have manifested and continue to manifest their worth by the benefit which they render man.

Though the quality of life to which any concept gives rise is the controlling criterion of the worth of that concept, there are important sub-criteria which must also be acknowledged.

Any significant philosophical theology must first of all have a reasonable inner coherence. By that I mean that it must not be shot through with gross contradictions and inconsistencies. Secondly, it must manifest a continuity with past thought and experience, for only by taking advantage of earlier human achievements can we hope to advance. Thirdly, any system of thought must have a high degree of contemporary consistency—that is, it must show itself to be in touch with the best knowledge and experience of its time. Finally, it must suggest new possibilities for the continuing development of human life.

Now the point I would stress here is that no one of these sub-criteria is, in isolation, a fully adequate criterion for evaluating a philosophy or theology—they are all relative to and in the service of the life of the community. Of course, even the greatest of philosophies do not possess all of these features to the same degree. Nevertheless, I think that it can safely be said that experience has shown that the only philosophies which prove worthwhile in the long run are those characterized by some degree of inner coherence, continuity with the past, consistency with the present and novel insights.

Within the philosophical framework which I have suggested, “transcendent divinity” is viewed as a human construct. I must again emphasize, however, that this does not necessarily render it a mere subjectivistic or psychological projection. I believe that at its best the notion of transcendent divinity expresses an attempt to articulate and develop an experience which, while it will always defy precise and definitive description, is indispensable in man’s effort to continually expand his horizons and thereby enrich his life. Despite the inevitable inadequacies which surround all formulations concerning this experience, we are not excused from attempting at all times to give the best and most serviceable description possible. Faith itself, understood as the concrete, historical experience which I described above, accounts for the continuity of faith. At every moment this faith will involve and employ concepts, symbols and institutions, but no particular

concept, symbol or institution can be held to be absolutely necessary for such faith. This does not exclude the possibility that some concepts, symbols or institutions might be indefinitely renewable, reformable and reconstructable, but the key point is that they must continually be shown as such in terms of concrete experience and not merely accepted as *given* and beyond critical scrutiny. Needless to say, not every concept, symbol and institution can be called into question simultaneously, either by an individual person or the community. Again I am stressing the radical nature of a faith which must continually be affirmed and affirmed in the absence of any absolutely certain underpinnings. It is most ironic that the radical openness which I am insisting upon for Christian faith is found most fully, though by no means perfectly, in the modern scientific community. The willingness to live and act and think without absolutely certain truths or without principles which are beyond being questioned has not impeded scientific development, yet we are often told by so-called "men of faith" that unless some principles and truths are absolutely certain and unchangeable we cannot avoid the destruction of faith and the emergence of nihilism. Between the two positions, which, we might ask, manifests a deficiency of faith?

To return to the question of transcendent divinity, it is by now evident, I hope, that I consider the phrase itself of secondary importance. The question, as I see it, is whether or not this phrase can any longer serve the community in its effort to deepen and develop its faith. My answer would be a qualified yes. The qualification, of course, is that transcendent divinity must undergo a radical reconstruction. While I suspect that such reconstruction can be undertaken from a number of perspectives, I would like to suggest something of what would follow from a reconstruction of "transcendent divinity" within a pragmatic, processive and relational world view.

Negatively, of course, any objectified transcendent divinity, any being considered as existing complete in itself and transcending the ever-changing world of experience, is inadmissible. Absolute and total transcendence is unacceptable because

it denies the reality of a mutual relationship between man and God and because it lessens the seriousness of the human effort to progressively transform and create the world.<sup>10</sup> It is not accidental that the escape mentality which has so plagued Christianity in modern times is bound up with the notion of a God who is not of this world but who prepares a haven for us in *his* world once we have served our time in this "vale of tears."

What I am rejecting, of course, is a transcendent divinity which is "supernatural." In my opinion, the category of the supernatural was developed over against a specific view of nature—a nature which was fundamentally closed and finished. Given such a view of nature, I think that the construction of the category of the supernatural was a necessary and liberating moment in the development of human consciousness. If, however, one views nature as open, as alive with unrealized but realizable possibilities and as radically developmental, then the category of the supernatural would appear less useful and indeed quite misleading.

A further implication of the position I am advocating is the rejection of God conceived as untouched by that change, suffering, novelty and growth which so characterize the reality we experience. Also unacceptable is any divinity who, possessed of unlimited power, can move in and out of man's world as he wills and at no risk to himself. Finally man can no longer revere a God fashioned after an Olympian spectator who, from his transcendent watchtower, observes the passing parade and simultaneously knows all things past, present and future.

Thus, with such crude brevity, I dispense with the traditional divine attributes of immutability, omnipotence and omniscience. I have made no pretence nor will I of having "proved" that God is not the possessor of such traits. In accordance with the philosophical position which I am maintaining, the matter is not provable either way. As a working principle, however, I would suggest that any concept of God is unacceptable which fails to illuminate human experience and

which destroys or severely lessens human creativity and autonomy. A God who is absolutely transcendent and thereby complete in himself, possessed of all possible creative power and knowledge, is quite irrelevant to ongoing human experience except, perhaps, as a magical divinity with whom we constantly plead to bail us out of our miserable situation. A further consequence of this concept of God is that man's belief in his own creativity and autonomy is reduced to the most deceptive of fictions. At best such a concept of transcendent divinity renders man little more than a servile imitator.

Each of these concepts—immutability, omnipotence and omniscience—I am suggesting, has been spawned by man and hence he can drop them or modify them as the situation demands. If, as I would contend, they are obstacles both to thought and to action—if they no longer serve to illuminate and enrich human life as they once did, then we must not continue to adhere feverishly to them. To do so is to give the impression that the Christian faith is inseparably bound up with these concepts and if the time of these concepts has passed, as I believe it has, both ourselves and others are tempted to think that the time of the Christian faith has also passed.

Thus far, I have been quite negative concerning the notion of transcendent divinity but I would not care to leave you with the impression that I find this way of conceiving God as completely worthless. On the contrary, I do not believe that any concept which has served so many men for such an extended time—I do not believe that such a concept could be completely empty and without value. I would like, therefore, to indicate the more positive features of this concept—those which I believe must somehow be accounted for in any reconstruction of God.

I find great significance in the fact that at a moment in man's history when the notion of a transcendent divinity is severely criticized by a majority of the reflective members of society—that at this moment man is conceived as an essentially self-creative and self-transcending being. As you all



know, this is a position held in various forms by contemporary existentialists and phenomenologists—atheist, secular and Christian.

Such an affirmation is also to be found in James and Dewey and other American pragmatists. A strength of the pragmatic recognition of human self-creativity is that the promethean element receives a balance and a corrective from an assertion of man's continuity with and dependence upon nature. Nature, for these thinkers, is not a hostile or absurd reality nor is it only superficially related to man—something to be neutralized and transcended. Rather, nature is the locus of man's being and his and its becoming are inseparably bound up one with the other. There can be no false deification of man—no temptation to think of man as the be-all and end-all of reality. "The sense of dignity of human nature," Dewey asserts, "is as religious as is the sense of awe and reverence when it rests upon a sense of human nature as a cooperating part of a larger whole."<sup>11</sup> I cite Dewey here rather than similar texts from James because Dewey was so explicitly hostile to the notion of "transcendent divinity" as he understood it and as it was generally understood at the time. Nevertheless, Dewey was unalterably opposed to any tendency of man to close in upon himself or to conceive himself as the apex of reality. Indeed he accuses both "militant atheism" and "traditional supernaturalism" of being guilty of a common sin, namely, "the exclusive preoccupation . . . with man in isolation."<sup>12</sup> My concern here is not with whether Dewey was just in his criticism of either atheism or supernaturalism—I am simply calling attention to Dewey's fervent affirmation of a "beyond" or, if you wish, "transcendent" dimension to human experience. Nowhere in his writings does Dewey express this more forcefully and beautifully than in the following text from his great work, *Art As Experience*:

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive whole which is the universe in which we live. This fact, I think, is the explanation of that feeling of exquisite intelligibility and clarity

we have in the presence of an object that is experienced with esthetic intensity. It explains also the religious feeling that accompanies intense esthetic perception. We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. I can see no psychological ground for such properties of an experience save that, somehow, the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience. This whole is then felt as an expansion of ourselves. For only one frustrated in a particular object of desire upon which he had staked himself, like Macbeth, finds that life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Where egotism is not made the measure of reality and value, we are citizens of this vast world beyond ourselves, and any intense realization of its presence with and in us brings a peculiarly satisfying sense of unity in itself and with ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

What is striking in this passage, I believe, is that Dewey is affirming something of what an older vocabulary called transcendence and immanence. I am not for a moment suggesting that Dewey is merely saying the same thing as earlier thinkers while using different words. On the contrary, the processive metaphysics which I am assuming does not allow for truth remaining the same while its conceptualization or verbalization changes. It does, however, allow for and insist upon continuity and so it can acknowledge a deep similarity of both situation and direction as regards developing experience. The assertion of novel experiences and realities does not involve the obliteration of earlier experiences and realities, though it does imply their transformation.

The recognition that thinkers of the stature of an Aquinas or a Hegel have attempted to account for something which they called Divine Transcendence and Divine Immanence should not wed us inseparably to their formulations. At the same time we should not overlook the possibility that they have given us a direction which must be received and con-

tinued however much it might be transformed. Whether the categories of Divine Transcendence and Divine Immanence carry too much historical baggage to be any longer useful is a question on which reasonable men are at the moment divided. Personally, I prefer the categories of *otherness* and *presence* for, vague and imprecise as both are and despite the fact that in an age of instant communication they are almost already hackneyed, I think that they have an experiential dimension that the more traditional categories lack.

Another advantage of substituting otherness for transcendence and presence for immanence is that this makes possible a much richer dialogue between those who believe in God and those who do not. While avoiding a superficial indifference, it does bring both groups of thinkers into contact in a non-polemical way. At the same time it imposes on both the obligation to attempt to deepen their own faith-interpretations of this experience while remaining open and responsive to the faith-interpretation of the other. Again, however, the experience of cooperative search is more important than the language employed to describe that search. For example, the following text from the atheist Roger Garaudy indicates the possibility for a deep sharing between Marxist and Christian in spite of the fact that they adhere to profoundly different faiths:

As far as faith is concerned, whether faith in God or faith in our task, and whatever our difference regarding its source—for some, assent to a call from God; for others, purely human creation—faith imposes on us the duty of seeing to it that every man becomes a man, a flaming hearth of initiative, a poet in the deepest sense of the word: one who has experienced, day by day, the creative surpassing of himself—what Christians call his transcendence and we call his authentic humanity.<sup>14</sup>

What is important, then, is not that we retain the phrase “transcendent divinity” but that we acknowledge certain features of reality some of which in the past have been associated with transcendent divinity. A partial list of these crucial fea-

tures would include openness, possibility, meaningfulness beyond what is now realized and increased significance and seriousness attached to the human struggle. A further requirement is that whether we call the transcendent aspect of reality God or simply The Other, the experience be such that it calls forth faith, hope and love.

I would like to close by citing a passage from Dewey's *Experience and Nature* in which he manifests a sense of balance and proportion that I think can serve us well as a guideline in any reflections upon the meaning of man and that mystery in which he is intimately involved but which is always beyond his encompassing:

Men move between extremes. They conceive of themselves as gods, or feign a powerful and cunning god as an ally who bends the world to do their bidding and meet their wishes. Disillusioned, they disown the world that disappoints them; and hugging ideals to themselves as their own possession, stand in haughty aloofness apart from the hard course of events that pays so little heed to our hopes and aspirations. But a mind that has opened itself to experience and that has ripened through its discipline knows its own littleness and impotencies; it knows that its wishes and acknowledgements are not final measures of the universe whether in knowledge or in conduct, and hence are, in the end, transient. But it also knows that its juvenile assumption of power and achievement is not a dream to be wholly forgotten.

It implies a unity with the universe that is to be preserved. The belief, and the effort of thought and struggle which it inspires are also the doing of the universe, and they in some way, however slight, carry the universe forward. A chastened sense of our importance, apprehension that it is not a yardstick by which to measure the whole, is consistent with the belief that we and our endeavors are significant not only for themselves but in the whole.<sup>15</sup>

## NOTES

1. For a somewhat fuller though still quite sketchy description of what is involved in "pragmatism's world-view," see my "Relig-

ious Truth in a Relational and Processive World," *Cross Currents* (Summer, 1967), pp. 287-301.

2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Meridian, 1960), p. 104.

3. John A. T. Robinson, *Exploration in God* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), chap. 5.

4. Dewey was strongly critical of the failure of the main tradition of Western philosophy to recognize that knowledge and belief were distinguished functionally rather than ontologically. Cf., e.g., the following: "The habitual avoidance in theories of knowledge of any reference to the fact that knowledge is a case of belief, operates as a device for ignoring the monstrous consequences of regarding the latter as existentially subjective, personal and private." *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p. 424.

5. Fontinell, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-304.

6. John Herman Randall, Jr., *Nature and Historical Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 198-99.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 199-201.

8. Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 13.

9. Randall, *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), p. 37.

10. The phrase "to progressively transform" is deliberate and not a grammatical mistake. The construction is intended to emphasize the directional dimension to the world-transformation in which man is involved.

11. Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 25.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

13. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), p. 195.

14. Roger Garaudy, *From Anathema to Dialogue* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 123.

15. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, pp. 419-420.

*V. Revisiting the Doctrine of God*

# The Divinity of the Holy Spirit

R. P. C. Hanson

## I

R. P. C. Hanson tackles no facile task—rehabilitation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, a doctrine whose customary interpretation he acknowledges as being inadequately supported in Scripture itself. Seeking to avoid the twin pitfalls of fanatic Pentecostalism and hieratic institutionalism, Professor Hanson offers an “open-ended” understanding of the doctrine. “The Holy Spirit is God returning in love to his own outgoing love manifested in Christ, and therefore it is a doctrine of God in ourselves, God in human experience; not God *as* human experience, but God in human experience, in the experience of the Church.” An Anglican priest, Professor Hanson is head of the University of Nottingham’s theology department. Among his numerous books are *Origen’s Doctrine of Tradition, Allegory and Event, Tradition in the Early Church, St. Patrick: His Origins and Career*, and, most recently, *The Origins of the Christian Ministry*. His essay first appeared in the April 1969 issue of *The Church Quarterly*.\*

IN DISCUSSING this subject it is useful to begin with a little healthy iconoclasm. Let me compress my iconoclasm into two sentences. There is no doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament: the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a third hypostasis (i.e., “Person”) within a Trinitarian Godhead is inadequately supported in the New Testament. When I say that there is no doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Old

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Testament, I do not mean that there is no mention of a holy spirit or a spirit of God in the Old Testament. There are of course plenty of such references. But they do not, all put together, amount to anything remotely approaching or even anticipating the Christian doctrine of *the* Holy Spirit. They are simply one of the ways in which the authors of the Old Testament refer to the activity of God, and not even a very common or significant way. They are comparable to references to "the arm of the Lord" or "the Word of the Lord," a vivid and characteristically concrete way of describing God's action. When the Bible tells us that the Spirit of the Lord brooded upon the waters at creation or that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson or Saul or activated Bezalel, or when those of us who follow lectionaries are led a bizarre dance round curiously ill-assorted snippets of the Old Testament at the season of Pentecost, all these references mean no more than that God produced the circumstances or inspired the people mentioned. Except insofar as they help us to understand that God is Spirit, i.e. free, unconditioned, not bounded by physical limitations, these texts contribute nothing toward the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and cannot seriously be described as foreshadowings of the Christian concept of God the Holy Spirit, not even as much as the Messianic texts are foreshadowings of the Christian concept of God the Son.

The figure of Wisdom in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament will give us very little help toward the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, because, with the best will in the world, we cannot prevent this figure being wholly ambiguous. What does it prefigure, if anything? The Word? Or the Spirit? The early Fathers, who cannot be accused of backwardness in trying to find prefigurations in the Old Testament, were markedly confused on this point. The majority of them see the Word, the Son, the Logos foreshadowed in the figure of Wisdom in this literature. The great key text of the Arian controversy, fought over as the dead body of Patroclus was fought over in Homer's *Iliad*, was Prov. 8:22, which in the Septuagint translation ran "The Lord created me the beginning of his ways,"



referring to Wisdom. Bitterly though both sides in this controversy differed on this text, everyone who dealt with it on both sides assumed that it referred to the Son, not the Spirit. A few Fathers see the Spirit in some of the other references to Wisdom in the Old Testament, but there is no sustained or elaborated tradition in this direction. The Fathers were ready to undertake the enterprise of finding evidence for a second divine being separate from God the Father in the Old Testament zealously enough. But even their stout hearts quailed before the task of finding evidence for a *third* divine being separate from God the Father there, and by their silence they quietly admit their failure at this point to live up to their exegetical principles. Where they failed we are not likely to succeed, especially as we are under no obligation to adopt their exegetical principles.

My second example of iconoclasm was to assert that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a separate hypostasis within a Trinitarian Godhead is inadequately supported in the New Testament. By this I mean that the usual method followed to discover evidence for this doctrine in the New Testament is a most unsatisfactory one. Evidence is produced that the Holy Spirit is in several texts spoken of as if he is a personal agent or even as if he were God himself, and this is usually regarded as a sufficient proof from the Scriptures of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. There are of course passages where the Holy Spirit is spoken of as a personal agent, notably in the "Paraclete" sayings in the Fourth Gospel and in a few other passages, such as Acts 16:6, "having been forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia." But in the first place we ought in justice to set against these the many passages in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit is spoken of in an impersonal way, not only in Acts but also in Paul, and we should note the manifest tendency of Paul to confuse or identify the Spirit with Christ (II Cor. 3:17, Rom. 8:26, 34). In the second place even if these "personal agent" passages were thought to outweigh the "impersonal force" passages, this evidence by itself is very insufficient to prove that the

Spirit is an hypostasis within the Godhead separate from the hypostasis of God the Father, wholly God but possessing an individual existence separate from that of the Father and the Son. Some of them, perhaps most of them, could, if no other evidence from the New Testament is called in, perfectly well be interpreted as meaning no more than what the Old Testament means by its references to the Spirit of God, simply the action of God himself, presumably God the Father. Far less can they reasonably be construed to witness to the separate existence of the Holy Spirit as a personality, i.e. as a "person" in our modern sense of the word, within the Godhead, though a surprising number of modern writers have attempted this impossible task. As will become evident later in this paper, not only do most modern theologians in my opinion draw conclusions about the Holy Spirit from the New Testament which the evidence alleged by them for it does not adequately support, but in my opinion they usually leave out entirely one of the most important pieces of evidence about the Holy Spirit to be found in the New Testament. It is not surprising if their accounts usually fail to carry conviction.

It is a well-known fact, and has been repeated in textbook after textbook ever since Harnack first proclaimed it, that the treatment of the Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the first three centuries is very inadequate. Many of them, such as Justin Martyr and Lactantius, seem to confuse the Spirit with the Word or to leave the Spirit a very subordinate or restricted place in the activity of the Trinity. They are by no means unanimous about the characteristic function of the Holy Spirit. Even when in the middle of the fourth century Christian writers begin to pay special attention to the Spirit the impression of confusion and uncertainty is not entirely removed. Athanasius in his *Letters on the Holy Spirit to Serapion* provides by reference to Scripture quite a good description of the function of the Spirit in redemption, but does not come near a definition of it, and his account of the peculiar characteristic of the Spirit within the Trinity is not very satisfactory or clear. The most important work on the theology of

the Holy Spirit done in the fourth century came, of course, from the pen of Basil of Caesarea. We can trace a developing and maturing movement of his thought upon this subject from his relatively early book *Contra Eunomium*, through a short later work known as *De Fide* up to his final *magnum opus*, written not long after the *De Fide*, his *De Spiritu Sancto*. In his *Contra Eunomium* he betrays an uncertainty and hesitation in writing about the Spirit, and he appears to be aware of the frailty and insufficiency of the Scriptural evidence on the subject. In his *De Spiritu Sancto*, hesitation has been replaced by confidence, both because he has by now properly integrated his doctrine into a philosophical background, and because he has discovered another source of doctrinal support for the theology of the Spirit—tradition.

The possibility of calling in tradition to supplement the inadequacy of Scripture on a subject under dispute had been realized nearly forty years earlier. The first person to make an appeal to it, Eusebius of Caesarea, writing against Marcellus of Ancyra about the year 340, had appealed to the baptismal formula to contradict the view of Marcellus that the Son only achieved hypostatic independence of God the Father at the incarnation. Some sixteen or seventeen years later, Athanasius makes the same appeal to the traditional baptismal formula in order to establish the co-eternity of the Spirit with the Father and the Son, and makes it more fully and confidently than had Eusebius. Basil's invocation of this evidence is much fuller and more elaborate than that of either of his predecessors in this argument. He appears to believe confidently in the preservation in the Church from the time of the apostles of a non-Scriptural tradition both of ceremony and of doctrine which regulated not only such matters as the baptismal formula, the formula of consecration in the eucharist, and the manner of Christians turning to the east for prayer and crossing themselves, but also some important doctrinal themes, and in these he appears to include the divinity of the Holy Spirit. This treatise has consequently been the refuge and palladium of all theologians in subsequent ages who have been anxious

to argue for tradition as a separate source of Christian truth from Scripture and one equal in authority and authenticity to Scripture. It is clearly no coincidence that the Holy Spirit should be the subject in connection with which this appeal was apparently first made as a major theme handled carefully and after long deliberation by a great theologian. It is interesting to compare how Gregory of Nazianzen, Basil's great friend, handles this subject when shortly after Basil's death, and not long after the publication of the *De Spiritu Sancto*, which Gregory must have read, he writes his *Fifth Theological Oration*. After arguing that we are bound by the logical consequences of Scripture even though they are not stated in Scripture, he produces a very interesting theory of progressive revelation which extends even beyond Scripture. In the Old Testament God the Father is clearly revealed but God the Son only dimly. In the New Testament God the Son is clearly revealed but God the Holy Spirit only dimly. He refers to the argument from the baptismal formula but does not give it much prominence. He makes no explicit mention at all of non-Scriptural tradition. He is quite as much aware as Basil of the insufficiency of Scripture on the subject of the Holy Spirit, but has found a different, and to my mind much more satisfactory, way of dealing with it.

## II

Let us now return to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. I have earlier said that most writers on this topic seemed to me to omit a vital element for understanding the subject. This is that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is deeply eschatological. The Holy Spirit is the sign of the Last Time. Apparently in Rabbinic thought of the first century before and the first after Christ, the Holy Spirit was associated with the Age to Come. Eminent Rabbis were declared to be "worthy of the Holy Spirit," but not to possess the Holy Spirit; this gift would be given to them in the Age to Come (whether this was conceived as the Messianic

Age or not). This accounts for the curious fact, which has given difficulty to several commentators, that whereas Jesus is recorded, in the Synoptic Gospels at least, as saying almost nothing about the Spirit, the book of Acts and the epistles of the New Testament are full of references to him. With the resurrection and the ascension the time of the Spirit came. John 7:39 indicates this explicitly. "This he said concerning the Spirit which those who believed on him would receive; for the Spirit was not yet (given); because Jesus was not yet glorified." But it is expressed in almost every line of the New Testament after the Fourth Gospel. In Paul the Spirit is a foretaste, first installment (*ἀρραβών*), of redemption (II Cor. 5:1-5); Christians have the privilege now of knowing "things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard," things which the rulers of this age do not know, because the Spirit, the Master of the new age, has revealed these things to them. The reason why Christians can be sure that they will receive new bodies at the resurrection is because they now have the Spirit, who is the link between the old time and redeemed time, between old creation and new creation (I Cor. 2:9, 10; II Cor. 5:5; Rom. 8:11, 23). To belong to the new creation is to walk after the Spirit (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:16-18, 28). The last Adam, the second Adam of the new age "became a life-giving spirit" (I Cor. 15:15-45). Joel's prophecy of the coming of the new age and last time is fulfilled in the pouring out of the Spirit (Acts 2:16-21; Rom. 5:5). Christians are partakers of the glory of the Last Time because they have the Spirit (I Peter 1:5; 4:14). Today is the "end of these days," and one of the distinctive doctrines of the community of the end, the Church, is that they are "partakers of Holy Spirit, and have tasted . . . the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 1:2; 6:5). The case is completed by the fourth Gospel's deliberate identification of the *parousia* with the coming of the Spirit (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:12-24).

This eschatological presentation of the Holy Spirit means that the Spirit in the New Testament is not a vague influence associated with Jesus Christ but the form in which, or in

whom, God appears to reign over his people at the Last Time. The Spirit is God as the dynamic, the life-giving power of the Church, the unseen Lord, Master, Guide and Inspirer of the Christian community, who gives instructions to apostles and disciples, sustains the faithful in persecutions and sometimes gives them glimpses of the future through Christian prophets or initiates them into mysteries through *glossolalia*. For the same reason the Spirit is peculiarly associated with prayer, with religious experience, with everything that has to do with man's response to God in the New Testament. There is scarcely a reference to prayer, to worship, to speaking with tongues, prophesying, singing hymns or psalms, making moral decisions or doing good works, in the New Testament which does not include, explicitly or implicitly, a reference to the Holy Spirit. Contrary to some Lutheran opinion, there *is* a doctrine of man's response to God in the New Testament. It is contained in the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is God in whom man returns to God. It is only in God that we can understand God; it is only the Spirit who can give us the power to perceive that in the story of Jesus of Nazareth we are encountering, not a myth of late Jewish antiquity, not an unhappy tale of cruelty and failure, not a curious example of the capacity of men to deceive themselves, but the move and offer and demand and loving act of God himself (I Cor. 1 and 2; Rom. 5:1-11). The Holy Spirit therefore is God-at-the-end-of-the-world, God reigning over his people at the Last Time, God creating and sustaining a community in whom mankind can be enlightened by faith and return to him in worship and love as the first fruits of a new creation, God the quickener and illuminator. The eschatological understanding of the Holy Spirit gives a depth and dimension and an unlimited significance to the subject which many recent treatments of it have lacked.

But the Spirit is not, of course, an isolated phenomenon. The Spirit is indissolubly connected with Jesus Christ. He is the Spirit of Christ, given within the framework of Christ's act and work, given as the climax and outcome and consum-

mation of Christ's career, given so that we can understand the significance of Christ and so that his work can be applied to us. If space allowed, something could here be said about the parallel between Christ's relation to the Father and the Spirit's relation to Christ. As Christ is God as far as he can be apprehended under the conditions of human existence, so the Spirit is Christ as far as he can be apprehended under the conditions of existence in history. Much could here be said about the Spirit's relation to the Church and to sacraments. But let it suffice to expand only one point, the relation of the Holy Spirit to time. The Holy Spirit is God sovereign over time, God resolving the tension between the once-for-all event and eternity. Christianity is an irretrievably historical religion; we cannot emancipate ourselves from the historical career of Jesus Christ. But it is not a purely historical religion, dedicated to the memory of a great historical personality. It combines in a unique way the details of unrepeatable events which took place nearly two thousand years ago and the present and continuing activity of God who is eternal and perennially contemporary. By its insistence upon the eschatological significance of Christ and of the Holy Spirit the New Testament indicates in its own way that the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the move of God himself into human affairs; it represented God pledging and committing himself into history and still remaining God. This is what the New Testament means by its account of God the Holy Spirit. This is what the fourth Evangelist intended when he represented Christ as saying that the Spirit would bring to mind what Jesus had said and would guide his disciples into all truth (John 16:7-14). The functions of the Holy Spirit which have been outlined here, seen in the light of the last time, given an eschatological significance as the signs and activity of God in the new age and the new creation, are the proper basis for the later doctrine of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and not the essentially futile search for evidence in the New Testament for the attribution of an *ὑπόστασις* or a "personality" to the Spirit.

## III

With this eschatological dimension of the Spirit in mind, we can face more confidently some of the difficulties concerning the doctrine of the Spirit which we inspected earlier in this paper. It is obvious why to expect to find the Spirit clearly mentioned in the Old Testament is futile. If the Spirit is an eschatological phenomenon, then he will not appear till the *ἐσχάτον*. If we seek for predictions or foreshadowings of him in the Old Testament, then we should look for them in eschatological passages, such as (perhaps) Isa. 44:1-5; Ezek. 37:1-14; 47:1-12; Joel 2:28-32. Otherwise the Old Testament can only help toward our understanding of the Holy Spirit in the same way as it helps toward our understanding of the incarnation. It pictures to us a God who is unconditioned, free, bound neither by physical nor metaphysical limitations, i.e. he is not restricted to one area or one Temple, neither is he impassible nor incapable of communicating with men.

We can also perceive the reason for one fact, a fact which does not perhaps strike theologians as odd but which does impress philosophers. We can give some answer to the question, Why should the Church have troubled to retain a doctrine of the Holy Spirit at all? The answer to this question is far from self-evident to those who have studied the history of early Christian doctrine. It manifestly is one of the questions which needs answering, which presents something of a problem. The Holy Spirit does not easily or naturally fit into any of the theological systems of the Christian writers of the first three centuries. Justin tends to confuse the Spirit with the Word. Irenaeus and Tertullian do rather better, but still cannot be said to have found a necessary and satisfactory place and function for the Spirit in their thought. Hippolytus and Novatian do no better, but rather worse. Origen of course, as an eminently sophisticated and able philosopher and theologian, made a much more impressive attempt to integrate the Spirit into his thought than any other Christian writer before him. But even he cannot possibly be said to have been com-



pletely successful. He subordinates the Spirit within the Trinity to a disastrous extent, and while we may say that the Word or Son is unequivocally necessary for his system, we could not confidently say that the Spirit was. Even with Athanasius we do not gain the impression that the position of the Spirit is the very heart of his thought, that in this point everything with him is at stake, as we do in the case of his advocacy of the divinity of the Son, but rather that he is defending a position which tradition logically demands that he shall defend. The Cappadocian fathers were the first to find a way of fully integrating the Spirit within their theological thought. It is remarkable that it took the Church three hundred years to achieve this position. In many ways it would have been much easier for the Church simply to drop the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, simply to preach a Binitarian God, unhampered and uncompromised by the necessity of including this awkward phenomenon, the Holy Spirit. It is surprising that the Church did not do this. The fact demands explanation.

The explanation, as I have suggested, lies in the eschatological nature of the Holy Spirit. It is not that as long as the expectation of an early *parousia* lasted, so long must Christians have believed in a Holy Spirit. The expectation of an early *parousia* did not last long, but the belief in the Holy Spirit was not pushed into the background as the belief in a *parousia* was. It is more accurate to say that the Holy Spirit was realized eschatology (I should say *is* realized eschatology) and realized eschatology could not be reduced nor dismissed nor demoted. Perhaps it was transposed or demythologized. But it was not deprived of its dynamic and effect. Here the Church was not dealing merely with a nexus of ideas, but with a reality felt by all believing and worshiping Christians. Here it was dealing with a continuing manifestation of God in a new mode of being, and this phenomenon could not be dismissed nor depreciated nor reduced, however difficult it might be to fit into theological or philosophical systems.

Our examination of the eschatological aspect of the Holy Spirit will also explain why the Fathers of the Church found

it so difficult to ground their doctrine of the Spirit adequately in Scripture. Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzen were outstandingly able theologians, among the most intellectual men of their time, and they had the advantage of three hundred years of Christian tradition behind them, that is to say three hundred years of intellectual trial and error, of intellectual experience. When they betray the fact that they find it difficult to discover adequate Scriptural support for their doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we must take notice of them. They were being exceptionally honest and perceptive. But if the Holy Spirit is God sovereign over time, God reconciling time and eternity, we should not expect to find full and satisfying witness of his activity in one collection of historical evidence, however crucial and indispensable that collection may be. We are ourselves involved in history and we cannot stand outside it. The Church is the sign of the activity of the Holy Spirit, the Church which is involved in history. It follows that we cannot understand the Holy Spirit simply from an account of the origins of the Church, even though we cannot understand the Holy Spirit without this account. We may describe the Holy Spirit as God continually bringing the Church into an encounter with the events of the career of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension. But even then we must take into account what happens in this encounter, what has happened and what may happen. There is therefore an incompleteness, an open-endedness about the Holy Spirit in Christian doctrine, and there ought to be. Basil of Caesarea tried to fill in this incompleteness by a spurious doctrine of secret tradition. Gregory of Nazianzen, more wisely, did not. He said that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was one of the things which the disciples could not understand when Christ was with them but would understand later. He appealed in fact, as did Basil, to the experience of the Church, but not (as did Basil) to the experience of the Church as supplying formal, concrete, original doctrine or information.

This "open-endedness" of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the measure of freedom from Scripture which it has, is a

witness to the freedom of God himself. We cannot make theology about the Holy Spirit in quite the same way as we can make theology about Christ, because Christ is God as he has chosen to limit himself to an historical career, whereas the Holy Spirit is God as he has chosen to manifest himself as also free and sovereign over even the history of salvation. Here again the eschatological aspect of the Holy Spirit makes itself felt. Eschatology puts all previous history under a question mark; history is obviously incomplete and we cannot yet know how it will end. So God as Holy Spirit puts all Church history under a question mark, and consequently all Church doctrine and institutions also. God chooses to retain his freedom in Holy Spirit. He has pledged and promised himself to us in Christ. Of that we can be sure. But he has not done so in such a way that we can confidently map out the future, either as a steadily increasing growth of the Church in an ever more powerful institution with an ever more elaborately articulated theology, or as a steady retreat of the Church to the catacombs and an indefinite existence upon the fringes of Christianity. God retains his right to cause the explosions and discontinuities in Church history. We cannot tie him down to history any more than we can tie him down to sacraments, to Scripture, or to philosophy. God is the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the consideration of the Holy Spirit which has been advanced in this paper should bring us to understand why less attention has been paid to the Holy Spirit by writers and theologians through history than to almost any other major part of Christian doctrine. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is peculiarly elusive and difficult. It is a doctrine in which we ourselves are involved more intimately than in any other. The Holy Spirit is God returning in love to his own outgoing in love manifested in Christ, and therefore it is a doctrine of God in ourselves, God in human experience; not God *as* human experience, but God *in* human experience, in the experience of the Church. We find it very difficult to analyze ourselves, impossible to stand completely outside ourselves and view

ourselves with entire objectivity. Similarly we find it not only difficult to analyze and write theology about God as we experience him, as we subjectively grasp him, but also embarrassing. It is easy to fall into a miasma of subjective fancies. It is easy to objectivize our experience of God and stereotype it so as to impose it as a rule on other people. It is easy to fall into Pentecostal fanaticism; it is easy to freeze into hieratic institutionalism. This is why conducting theology about the Holy Spirit is particularly difficult. But at the same time as we are aware when we begin discoursing theologically about the Holy Spirit that we are in a field where self-deception is specially easy, either about our own experience or about the experience of the Church, we are also aware that we are here at the fountain of life as far as our transitory sublunary human affairs are concerned. We are dealing with the Lord and Giver of Life, he who assures us that the Church and all its components and accessories, however dreary and ineffective they may appear, is the chosen people of God, that the Bible, for all its human limitations, is the record of the Word of God, and that the sacraments, however meanly or uncomprehendingly administered, are the places where the Church encounters God. The difficulty of exploring this area of theology is great; the subject is obscure and not wholly comprehensible. But the reward and the satisfaction are great also, if as we probe the subject of God the Holy Spirit we are led by the Spirit to realize his power and activity.

# The Futurist Option in Speaking of God

Robert W. Jenson

Fully aware of the hazards of theological prediction, Robert W. Jenson nonetheless ventures some guesses about where the doctrine of God is going. The new doctrine of God, Jenson suggests, will speak not of God's timeless persistence but of his radical futurity, and will set forth an understanding of his being as event rather than as "thing." "We must learn to say that the relations which are the life of God are also and first relations of Opening and being Opened, of Promise and Hope. The love of the Father and the Son is their relation to their mutual future in the Spirit, always anticipated in the Father but never bound. In the life of the triune God—we must learn to say—*freedom* occurs." Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Dr. Jenson is the author of such books as *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth*, *A Religion Against Itself*, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, and *God After God*. His paper is reprinted from the February 1969 issue of *The Lutheran Quarterly*.\*

I HAVE BEEN ASKED to predict the future development of the doctrine of God, and to write not as a scholar, but as "prophet, or at least wise-man." Claiming either role is bad enough; claiming the prophet's role is dangerous besides: it might be granted, with catastrophic psychic and social results. I will stick to playing wise-man—he who plays wise-man risks becoming in fact merely a wise-guy, but that is still better than paranoia.

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The wise-man predicts the future by extrapolating from the present. What I will therefore try to do is see where theology can go from where it is. The *believing* wise-man extrapolates *hopefully*. Therefore, against my worldling's better judgment, I will assume that theology is going somewhere.

# I

There is indeed a Christian God who has died, to whose corpse our attention has recently been called once again. Predictably, I will claim that the deceased was not the only candidate for the God-job, and that in particular he was not the gospel's candidate (if this claim is not made we have all gone out of theological business, and should admit it). Yet I must confess that all possible alternative candidates are so unlike what has previously been called "God," that someone could make a good case: find another name, like "Father of Jesus," for this Transcendence of yours, and then just say, "the Father does the useful bits of what we used to think God did." I must also admit that the dead God's corpse is still the *explicit* object of worship in most of the Christian church.

How have we gotten to this position? How, for that matter, do Christ's followers come to talk about God in the first place?

Christ's men are called to follow him—to death. Yet this call is supposed to be good news, news of life. Thus the gospel must claim that the reality of Christ transcends death, transcends the absurdity of time, which at once compels us to live by hope—for we are not yet what we shall be—and turns, by decreeing our end, all hopes into might-have-beens. But not only Christ's followers have a vision of a reality transcending the absurdity of time; all men, insofar as they believe that life has meaning, seek this vision. We call this search religion, and its object God. Thus religion and faith share the hope of a reality in which all is reconciled that time tears apart, a reality which appears to religion as "God."

The concept of a reality that reconciles past and future is, however, not only shared but also disputed. For religion and

the gospel reconcile time in precisely antithetical ways. The triplicity of time as past, present and future is always asymmetrical: the present is either anticipation of the future or repetition of the past; being is either innovation or reaction. There are two transcendences, two ways in which reality escapes our control: there is the transcendence of the future and the transcendence of the past. If the transcendence of the past arbitrates the future, if guilt or security determines what we can become, transcendence appears as changeless, timeless *Being* in which all remains, or finally returns to, what it was in the Beginning. Religion's God is the exemplification of this Being. But it might also be that the transcendence of the future could arbitrate the past. The gospel suggests that this is so—or rather claims to make it so, for it is the story of one who gave up his life as his possessed past, and received it again as future for himself and his fellows: "He shall come again to judge. . . ." So Paul interpreted the gospel as a message of the justification of the *ungodly*, of the future which is independent of what I have been and so am, which permits me to interpret my past as possibility of future love in spite of itself.

The first round of the dispute over time between religion and the gospel ended in a compromise, producing the Christian religion and its vision of God. Religion won the doctrine of the being of God, who was defined as the absence of time, the persistence of the past. The future won the doctrine of the Trinity, of the God whose being is becoming: "begetting," being "begotten" and "proceeding" (whatever these words may otherwise mean). The two doctrines fit ill together, but the seam was papered over with various devices, notably the doctrine of "analogy," which could at any point dispense one from taking seriously the particular assertion about God which was at that point inconvenient. It is this composite God who has died. We need not here recount again the tale of his last illness or attempt a diagnosis; since Barth's *Commentary on Romans* this has been done repeatedly, from every angle and quite adequately.

It is therefore no accident that simultaneously with the

observation of the death of the Christian religion, the futurity of the gospel's God was rediscovered. God, said Barth, is "the eternally future." God, said Bultmann, is "the insecurity of the future." From 1920 to the present, "eschatology" has been the big word, and hope the recommended mode of existence. But beginnings are usually also conclusions; the dialectical theology was also the final development of the religious form of Christian faith. All its reflection remained under the spell of timelessness: the eschaton was not proclaimed as a time, but as the immanent crisis of every time, having no extension in time, no before and after, and so no narratable content of its own. Thus rediscovered hope suffered a peculiar involution: hope is not hope *for* any narratable event, as the human act of hoping it must itself also be the object of that act. In the dialectical theology, we hope to be able to hope. God too is bent in on himself: he is the God whose reality is the future, yet has no particular future of his own. He is abstract futurity. He thus comes to utterance only in the breakdown of all possible informative utterances we might have made about him. About *this* "Power of the future" there is nothing to say.

And so we reach the present. Our generation has taken the step merely by making an observation: hope that is not hope *for* anything is nonsense; the Transcendence of a future which is no particular future is as good as no God at all. This observation leaves only two options: at last give up the God thing altogether, or learn to bespeak *the particular future of God*. The first option is the more plausible. Determination to realize the second is the common dynamic of the otherwise very different theological programs of Pannenberg, Moltmann, Braaten, Sauter or—for that matter—myself. If this option cannot be realized, I see no future for faith in God (retreat to religion and its timeless God, purified of contamination by the gospel-promises, will of course always be available for those who like that sort of thing: worried WASPs, hippies, football coaches, etc.). But then, I am not a prophet, and limited to extrapolation.

I will extrapolate by stating the theological tasks that will



have to be performed if the futurist option is to be fulfilled, and by guessing what sort of doctrine of God will result if these tasks should be performed successfully.

## II

First, the problem evaded by dialectical theology must be solved. I call it the antinomy of hope. If hope is hope *for* a narratable future, then if hope triumphs (and it must always expect to triumph, or it is not hope), that future will someday become the present and hope will cease. Thus hope with content seems to be inherently temporary, and therefore not to be itself a character of authentic existence. Yet hope that is not hope for anything is nonsense. Unless this puzzle can be solved, the basis on which it arises, the attempt to take hope as the fundamental existential of authentic humanity, leads to contradiction or vacuity and must be abandoned—and with it, I think, God.

Pannenberg has seen the same antinomy in slightly different terms: if we are given a narratable promise of what is finally to come of us, is not the essential newness and unpredictability of the future denied, and hope turned into inhuman omniscience? Yet without such a promise, there can be no hope. Pannenberg has gone to work on one side of the task with his usual energy, showing how a proleptic occurrence of the End in the resurrection of Jesus at once enacts the End for us and yet opens an unpredictable future of the endlessly creative interpretations of what it can mean to be raised.

But there is a prior task, which, so far as I can see, has not been taken up: to understand the final object of hope as *itself* a reality which will be achieved, which will become present, without ceasing to be future. The task, of course, is not to invent an object of hope to this specification, but to ask whether the gospel in fact proposes such a hope.

It seems to me that I can see the way ahead here, though not all its turnings. The gospel talks often of *love* as the reality of God and of the new man toward whom we live. And if we

look at the temporal structure of the phenomenon love, it seems to have just the shape we are seeking. For love is a describable state of affairs; we can very well hope to achieve it, and to know, when we have achieved it, that we have done so. Yet love once achieved does not close the future, nor do we have to lose it again to continue to hope for it. When I love I wait to receive my life from what my beloved does, *without* deciding in advance what this may be—for it is exactly my beloved's freedom that I love. I await my future from my beloved knowing that it will be good, without thereby making the future predictable, for I expect to *learn* what is good from what my beloved in fact does. Moreover, love when achieved remains just so an object of hope. It is because of this temporal structure of love, I think, that faith, hope and love will remain in the End, yet love be the greatest—love is the eschatological reality of faith and hope.

Now there is, of course, no such thing as love-in-general, only particular loves. It is Jesus' love we have been discussing: his act of losing his life for his fellows in order just so, and only so, to find it for himself and for them. We are led to discuss *his* love by the news of his resurrection which makes that love future for us. The coming of this love is that conclusion of our lives, whose transcendence is the God of the gospel.

The next great theological undertaking—supposing that authentic theology continues at all, and however long it takes to get down to it—will therefore be to work out descriptions of Jesus' love as the future whose transcendence we will call God. These will not be supernatural descriptions of a "heaven" merely "analogously" like what we here call love—that would put us right back in the religious quest. They will be *political* or *cosmological* eschatologies: specifications of the structure of a community created by the self-giving of Jesus; or cosmologies in the style, though not with the content, of Teilhard.

We will—we must—learn to talk of our political hopes and of the future man Jesus in one logical breath, to do talk of Jesus which is promise to the daily political quest. We will—

we must—learn to talk of the career of matter and energy as part of the career of the future man Jesus. Indeed, we have still to learn to talk of our “personal” problems of sex and vocation and guilt in the course of telling Jesus’ story, for although we suppose we already do this, we are deluded: we use him as a model or a crutch, and he fits neither role. It is the transcendence which will come to utterance in such talk that we will mean by “God.”

None of us are *this* God’s natural clientele; only those of us will need him who are somehow compelled by the story of Jesus to live with an aberrant time structure, to live from the future for the past. His identification as the object of Christian worship can be expected to cause a general shaking-out of the spirits. Person by person and segment by segment American Christendom will be compelled to make the decision it has so long evaded: between being an ideology of timelessness, for the justification of the status quo, or being a faith in the Father’s radical temporality, his concrete newness, for the upset of every status quo.

### III

If the gospel’s talk of God is as we have described it, it wrenches our inherited language and habits of perception dreadfully. We think that what is safely locked into the changeless past is real, and hope that the open and uncontrollable future is unreal. We say that the present moment is real, which is true—but we mean that in the present which can be traced causally from the past, not the indeterminations in the present through which the future enters. We rightly think that real things must be continuous through some time, but understand a thing’s continuity as its persistence in what it began as, not its openness to what it will be. “Being,” the great metaphysical word, carries in our inherited language the meaning: “resistance to change.” Therefore if someone says that God is future, we suppose he must be some special sort of atheist.

The language and habits of perception with which the gospel's grammar thus clashes are, however, only *inherited*. They may have been inherited from Adam (perhaps this inheritance is our original sin), but even so there is no logical necessity to them. We *can* be called to different a prioris. The gospel so calls. Enforcing the plausibility of the gospel's talk of God requires that we now make the gospel's ontological implications explicit. The second task in the doctrine of God is a radical effort of revisionary metaphysics.

The apex proposition of a new ontology will be: *to be* is not to resist change, but to be open to change; being is not immunity to the threatening future, but the call to the future. This is merely a philosophical translation of "He that loses his life shall find it." In the old metaphysics, that I am is guaranteed by something characteristic of *myself*, by a resistance to cessation which belongs to the substance "I." In a new ontology, "being" is the possibility of becoming other than I am, and is therefore not a characteristic of myself. The guarantee that I am comes as a call from beyond me.

Therefore being is *communication*; to be is to be addressed. To the question "What am I?" the answer must be a description of my conversation, a specification of to what and to whom I hearken and of how I answer. Or we may say: being is love, my being is the occurrence *between* you and me which relates us. The abstract "I" that is related is either the mere logical possibility of myself, or the fallen self that occurs as my withdrawal from that availability to you which is my true being.

By itself, of course, "being" is an empty word, whether we make it mean resistance to change or the call to change. In either case, the word gets its content from material assertions of the thinking that uses it. In the old ontology, there are the metaphysical assertions that "being" is interchangeable with "goodness and truth," i.e., that what I am is the justification of the fact that I am. This is exactly the past-directed works-righteousness which the gospel contradicts. In the new ontology, the material assertions that give content to "being" are those of the communication which calls us to understand

reality in this way in the first place: the narrative of what Jesus has done and will do. To be is to be coming to play a role in his career, it is to be under way to a conclusion told by his story.

Which brings us back to God. In every metaphysics which speaks of God, God is the doer of our being, and the exemplar of our being. We will do new metaphysics in order to speak newly of God: no longer as our guarantor against the threatening call of the future, but as the call; and no longer as the exemplification of timeless persistence in what has been, but as the explication of the future's freedom from—for—the past.

We will do new metaphysics as our grasp of God's being as an event, rather than as an analogue to a—personal—thing. God—we will learn to say—does not exist, he happens. He does not exemplify attributes, he does them. He is an act who needs no prior actor—not even to be rightly called "He." Just this is his difference from us.

We will do new metaphysics as our grasp of God's being as utterance, the utterance that enables our being-as-communication. God—we will learn to say—occurs as the utterance of one man to another which in what it specifically says *creates* communication, creates the possibility of temporality. He is the address that opens the conversation which is our being. He is neither above nor within us; he occurs *between* us. God is the act of communication that creates communication, the word to which all other words respond.

The content of communication which in fact has this structure is the story of Jesus told over against all that obligating communication in which we always already live. God is the occurrence of this story as a living communication between men. We are dissatisfied with this identification: it makes God seem less real. But that is because we are captive to an understanding of what it is to be real which is precisely contradicted by the gospel (and by the Lutheran doctrine of the Word and the Sacraments). Our metaphysical task is to learn to understand reality so that this identification of God no longer makes us uneasy for his reality.

## IV

The doctrine of God which will become possible if these tasks are accomplished will be one where the doctrine of the trinity is no longer additional information about a God otherwise and religiously identified, but itself the identification of God. The main spiritual issue in the doctrine of God is his identity. There are innumerable candidates for the God-job: which is the true one? Any proposed answer will take the form of a set of descriptions: "God is the one who . . . , and who . . . etc." In the traditional doctrine of God, these have been derived as direct expressions of our religious quest for assuagement of time's threatening future: "God is the timeless one, the always present one, etc." If God is once thus identified as the victorious transcendence of the past, all our efforts to go on to speak of his grace, of love and forgiveness, of his radical futurity, remain unconvincing. Despite our protestations, men have heard in our talk of God the triumph of guilt and/or security.

The doctrine of the trinity was born as protest against this triumph. It was born as insistence that in "God himself" we will find no other temporality than he lives for us in his "economy," i.e., in his occurrence in time. God occurs for us as the gift of time, as the possibility of living *for* a future fulfillment just as we come *from* the past: he occurs as God future, God past and God present, as Perfector, Creator and the Reconciliation of both. The doctrine of the trinity says that as he occurs for us, so he is: he is in himself Goal, Origin, and History, he is for himself God future, God past and God present. There is no timeless essence of God "above" the three-in-oneness of God's temporal self-distinction in his life for us. So said the fathers.

The trinitarian explosion of the gospel's God was quickly domesticated by being given the futile place of what we go on to, having begun quite differently. Yet just so it has compelled us at least not to rest wholly content with our divine security

blanket, and lived as an underground, if largely ineffective, disturber of the religious peace. Now we must affirm that disturbance.

A doctrine of the trinity which becomes the set of identifying descriptions for "God," and is thereby itself set free from captivity to a religious prior identification, will be a new doctrine. I can see two points clearly. First, as soon as it is clear that God is *event*, the trinitarian language about three "hypostases" in one "ousia," and about the hypostases as "relations subsisting in God," sheds its near meaninglessness. I think it could be shown that in the peculiar trinitarian use of "hypostasis" an apprehension of what recent thought has called "*Dasein*," or "existence," struggled toward expression. If we admit the event-character of God's being, the hindrances will be removed, and we will be able to say: God's *act of being* the one God is three times repeated, and must be so repeated for him to be the particular one God He in fact is. God posits himself as the God He will be in relationally triple acts of self-choice: in the way of Originating, and in the way of being Originated, and in the way of being Projected.

Second, a structural innovation is required. Traditional trinitarian theory spoke of the First Hypostasis as the *fons trinitatis*, the ground of deity, from whom the Second and Third Hypostases *receive* their godhead. Barth put it so: In God there is "an Origin and two Goings-forth." This must indeed be said, but it is false to the gospel's talk of God unless it is accompanied by, and indeed subordinated to, another doctrine: that the Third Hypostasis, the *Spirit*, is the *Goal* of the Trinity. The Father and the Son are God only in that God's Past and his Present are wholly open to their mutual Future in the Spirit. In God there is a Goal and two Openings.

It is the doctrine of the trinity which makes talk of the "living" God real. According to the traditional doctrine, the hypostases in God are "subsisting relations": They simply *are* their relations, of Originating and being Originated, to each other. Thus the being of God is Giving and Receiving, Sending and being Sent: God's reality is *life*, for in it *obedience*

occurs. This must be said, but again it is by itself false to the gospel. For in this traditional doctrine it is clear how the word which calls to obedience, the law, is the expression of the life of God, how it is *God's* word. But that the gospel promise which gives freedom expresses God's reality remains a mere assertion. We must learn to say that the relations which are the life of God are also and first relations of Opening and being Opened, of Promise and Hope. The love of the Father and the Son is their relation to their mutual future in the Spirit, always anticipated in the Father but never bound. In the life of the triune God—we must learn to say—*freedom* occurs.

By such an evocation of God's "intertrinitarian" life the freedom of God is found in that life itself. We therefore will no longer need to assure it by the traditional devices: by distinguishing an "immanent" trinity from an "economic" trinity as two levels of being, so as to establish an independence of God himself, the immanent trinity, from God-for-us, the economic trinity. We will instead be able to follow the obvious tendency of trinitarian logic and simply use the "immanent" doctrine of the trinity and the "economic" doctrine of the trinity as two ways of describing the *same* reality: the "immanent" description makes clear that God *could have been* otherwise the triune God than as Jesus, the Father of Jesus and the Future of Jesus. He could have been, but in fact he is not. The Father's sending and the Son's obedience are in fact the prayer and obedience of Jesus to his "Father" in the desert and Gethsemane. The Spirit's hope is in fact Jesus' resurrection. And so finally the doctrine of the trinity, freed of its subordination, would identify God so: God is what happened and will happen between Jesus the Israelite, the Transcendence he called "Father," and the rest of us, as the communication-event which articulates our temporality to be life for a future.

The coming doctrine of the triune God will, I expect, take strange and unpredictable forms in making this identification. The doctrine displays the logic of the identification which the gospel makes of God, and so leads us, as we follow that logic,



to ever deeper apprehension of what it means that this God is God. If the trinitarian doctrine is set free, there is no predicting what it will teach us. Yet let me finish with an entirely unguarded leap into one new form the doctrine may take.

God, we said, is the *word* that evokes being-as-communication. He is the occurrence of the law and the gospel. If we now note, with such thinkers as Fuchs, that every utterance depends on a *given* language, and *aims* at mutual understanding which it achieves by finding new language, we can say: God is Language (the First Hypostasis), Utterance (the Second), and New Understanding (the Third). The three hypostases in God are one God; that is: God is that Utterance whose presupposed Language is no other language than the New language of Understanding which He will achieve—and this is his aseity, his deity.